St. John the Baptist's Church

Chundikuli, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

225th Anniversary Commemorative Volume

1801–2026

"Give thanks to the LORD,
for He is good;
His steadfast love endures forever."

Psalm 118:1

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Title	:	St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli 225th Anniversary Commemorative Volume 1801–2026
Published by	:	St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli, Jaffna, Sri Lanka
Editor	:	Dr. A. Harry Gnanarajan, Ph.D. (ORCiD): https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9768-1775
ISBN	:	978-624-4965-00-8
Pages	:	3+82
Paper Size	:	B5 (17.6 x 25.0 cm)
Cover Photograph	:	Front view of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli
First Edition	:	August 2026
Printer	:	Mathi Colours, Jaffna, Sri Lanka

Digital Edition

A digital edition of this commemorative volume is available online through recognised digital repositories, ensuring its long-term preservation and accessibility for readers, researchers, and future generations.

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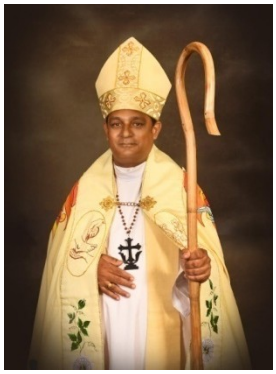
Message from the Rt. Rev. Dushantha Rodrigo

Bishop of Colombo



The parish of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli stands out as a church with many firsts. It is the first Anglican community known to have existed in the Jaffna Peninsula. The first person of Indian origin to be ordained and sent to oversee the mission was the Rev. Christian David. The Rev. J. Talbot was the first European minister to serve the parish, continuing his ministry until 1849.

Its long and rich heritage and Christian witness through the years are a testimony to God's faithfulness in its mission. My first visit to Jaffna was in 2001 as a young priest. At the earliest opportunity, I visited the parish, and it became clear to me that St. John the Baptist's Church stood as an edifice built not merely of stone and mortar but upon the faith of the generations of people who had worshipped there. Its long history is not something to be proud of or to boast about; rather, it is one that makes us humble and steadfast in the faith, knowing that God does not abandon His people in times of adversity but instead draws closer to them and leads them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.

It is a great tragedy that many had to leave the Peninsula and the country in search of safety, leaving behind the place they called home and the spiritual home they found in St. John the Baptist's Church to live and work in different parts of the world. Yet, for many, it remains their spiritual home, and their loved ones are laid to rest beneath the shade of the palmyrah trees.

St. John the Baptist, after whom the Church is named, stood on the banks of the River Jordan and called those who came to him to repentance, turning their hearts towards truth and justice. May this remind us of our own calling to heed the voice of truth and justice and to respond faithfully so that all people may live in freedom and dignity in this land.

As the parish celebrates its 225th Anniversary, I wish the clergy and parishioners God's choicest blessings as they strive each day to be faithful disciples of Christ, proclaiming Him in word and deed, in season and out of season, and always serving others. May St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli, continue to be a beacon of hope and a voice calling for reconciliation and lasting peace.

Rt. Rev. Dushantha Rodrigo,
Bishop of Colombo

Greetings from the Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera

Former Bishop of Colombo

Geetha and I have vivid memories of your parish and count it a great privilege to send you this message of congratulations and personal greetings as you keep this historic anniversary.

May your celebrations include a time of reflection, and may your community be encouraged by the Lord of life, ever present among you.

From your early beginnings, visionary men and women, young and old, clergy and laity, including several faithful sextons, have strengthened and enriched the life of your congregation and indeed the wider community in which you have been placed. This was particularly true of your faith, courage, and witness through those very worrying and tense days of war and uncertainty, death, disappearances, and displacement.

Through your long and varied history, your Parish has come to gently assume the role of Mother Church in the Peninsula, watching over and encouraging other persons and communities elsewhere to trust in Jesus and walk with him through the hardships and opportunities of life.

Your Parish has also had an enabling relationship with our educational institutions in Jaffna: the Nuffield School, Chundikuli Girls' College, and St. John's College. The regular combined services conducted in your church for the girls and boys of Chundikuli Girls' College and St. John's College somewhat broke the segregation of the sexes of these institutions, separated by a public road, and, on a lighter note, nurtured some very fine boy-girl friendships that matured into very happy marriages.

Today, your congregation, like all communities in the North, faces two daunting challenges. These are: how dignity and privacy are to be achieved for the still crushed Tamil community in an active non-violent way, and the seemingly connected issue of the migration of youth to other parts of the world and Lanka. We are confident that, with the sensitive guidance of your Vicar, Fr Stephen, and other wise lay persons and youth, you will address these realities in the spirit of the Asian Saint: "slowly, carefully and watchfully."

May your shared life and common journey be full of joy, faithfulness, and gratitude, always.

With affectionate regards, peace, and blessings to you all,
Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera,
Former Bishop of Colombo

Greetings from the Rt. Rev. Dhiloraj Ranjit Canagasabey

Former Bishop of Colombo

It gives me great pleasure to send my greetings to the Vicar, Wardens, and Congregation of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli, Jaffna, as you give thanks to God for His great faithfulness throughout the 225 years of your parish's history.

The mission of the Church has been to instil faith in all people, especially during times of great crisis, including the 30 years of civil war. We thank God for all the clergy and laity who have served Him faithfully in this parish during those difficult days.

This Church has also been a beacon of light to the people of Jaffna, irrespective of caste, class, race, or religion, as well as to the school community of St. John's College and Chundikuli Girls' College.

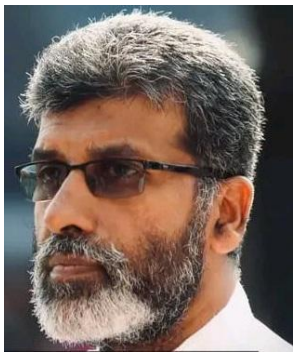
We pray God's richest blessings upon the St. John's Church community as you take a plunge of faith into the unknown.

Prayers and Blessings.

Rt. Rev. Dhiloraj Ranjit Canagasabey,
Former Bishop of Colombo

Message from the Ven. Dr. S.D.P. Selvan

Archdeacon of Jaffna



Praxis of 'Doing Repentance' towards the Reign of God:
A life based on 'Doing Repentance' (Matthew 3:2 and Luke 3:3) is an opportunity to live as 'the community of Repentance' for the Reign of God, and opting for it when it is given is a commitment-based duty. The paradigm shift of 'Doing Repentance' should not be understood based on the individual, but should focus on communities affirming Jesus' Reign of God in the present time.

The Church should be seen as a renewed Jesus-community for the present, and it should be a place where the practice of 'Doing Repentance' is expressed daily. This gives the Church an identity of "Repentance - Believe - Sacrifice", rooted in the values of the Reign of God, resisting evil through the ethics of discipleship and transformation, and shaping a lifestyle of the spirituality of St. John the Baptist grounded in that foundation.

மனம் மாறுங்கள் மனம் மாறுங்கள்
தினம் மாற்றங்கள் சாத்தியம்
மன்னிப்புப் பெற மன்னிப்புப் பெற
தினம் வாழ்ந்து காட்டுங்கள்

நற்கனியற்ற மரங்கள் தீயில் இடப்படும்.
நஞ்சாக்க மனிதர்கள் தப்ப முடியாது.
நாச ஏரோது நடத்தையை துணிவுடன் கண்டித்தால்
நாமுமின்று திருமுழுக்கு யோவான்களே யோவான்களே

மனமாற்ற சமூகம் ஆக இறை அழைப்பு
மறத்தை அறம் ஆக்க இணை உயிர்த்து
மாண்பை உறுதியாக்க பகிர்ந்து உழைத்தால்
நாமுமின்று திருமுழுக்கு யோவான்களே யோவான்களே

It is fitting that we give thanks to God for the past 225 years in the history of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli, Jaffna, and remember with gratitude all those who have embodied the way of Jesus—missionaries (Joseph Knight), presbyters (the Revd. Christian David and others), laity, helpers, and the people of Chundikuli—who have faithfully served in this ministry, sharing in our common life and witness.

It is equally appropriate that all of us, including the Jesus community of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli, remain open to the "Cry of the Desert (Suffering Servant)" and work with commitment, practising "doing repentance" in response to the signs of the times—political, social, economic, cultural, and religious—within the realities of Jaffna, the North, Sri Lanka, and the wider world.

Ven. Dr. S.D.P. Selvan,
Archdeacon of Jaffna

Greetings from the Ven. S. P. Nesakumar

Former Vicar & Archdeacon of Jaffna

It is with immense joy, gratitude, and thanksgiving to Almighty God that I extend my heartfelt greetings to the clergy, congregation, past parishioners, and well-wishers of St. John's Church, Chundikuli, on the occasion of its 225th Anniversary.

St. John's Church is not merely a parish to me; it is my mother church, the place where my spiritual journey was nurtured and shaped. I fondly remember my Sunday School days, learning the Word of God and growing in faith under the guidance of dedicated teachers and clergy. I was privileged to be prepared for Confirmation by the late Rev. A. J. C. Selvaratnam, whose ministry left a lasting impression on my life.

As a young member of the congregation, I actively participated in the choir, youth fellowship, and various church activities. Those formative years strengthened my faith and commitment to Christian service. It was within the fellowship of this beloved church that I first experienced God's call to the priesthood. I remain deeply grateful to Rev. Joseph Sarvananthan, who encouraged and guided me in responding to that call and sent me to the Seminary for ministerial formation.

By God's providence, during the difficult period of war and displacement, I was sent by the late Bishop Gnanapragasam to serve St. John's Church beginning in January 1991. What was intended as an appointment became a blessed ministry of nearly twenty-one years, continuing until December 2011.

Those years were marked by immense challenges as our people endured the hardships of war, displacement, uncertainty, and loss. During the height of the conflict, many displaced families found refuge within the parish premises. Together we shared their struggles, fears, and hopes, while seeking God's strength and guidance amidst the turmoil. The church became not only a place of worship but also a sanctuary of comfort, compassion, and hope for the suffering community.

The parish also witnessed many significant milestones during my ministry. In 1995, with God's blessing, we were able to purchase and establish the present two-storeyed vicarage situated directly opposite the church, providing a permanent and convenient residence for future clergy serving the parish.

St. John's Church also became the setting for some of the most cherished moments of my personal life. In 1999, I was united in Holy Matrimony in this sacred sanctuary. In 2000, my wife and I were blessed with our daughter, Thaniya, who was baptized in this church. These precious memories have further deepened my bond with this parish and its people.

One of the most memorable highlights of my ministry at St. John's Church was the celebration of the Bicentenary (200th Anniversary) of the parish in 2001.

It was a historic and joyful occasion that brought together parishioners from near and far in thanksgiving to God for two centuries of faithful witness and ministry. Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera led the Thanksgiving Service and it remains a cherished memory in the life of the parish. To mark this significant milestone, a special choir comprising 200 voices was formed to offer songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. The uplifting worship, fellowship, and sense of gratitude shared by the congregation made the Bicentenary celebration a truly unforgettable event.

Although I concluded my ministry at St. John's Church in December 2011, the connection remained strong. In 2012, I had the privilege of celebrating the Thanksgiving Service marking the 25th Anniversary of my Ordination to the Priesthood in this very church. It was a deeply meaningful occasion to return and give thanks to God in the place where my faith was nurtured, my calling was confirmed, and much of my ministry was exercised.

As we celebrate this remarkable milestone of 225 years, we give thanks for the faithful clergy and lay leaders who have served this parish across generations. We remember with gratitude all those whose sacrifices, prayers, and dedication have enabled St. John's Church to remain a beacon of Christ's light in Jaffna and beyond.

May the Lord continue to bless St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli, with faithful leadership, spiritual growth, and a renewed commitment to proclaiming the Gospel and serving humanity. May future generations cherish this rich heritage and continue the mission entrusted to them by Christ.

"Thus far the Lord has helped us." (1 Samuel 7:12)

Ven. S. P. Nesakumar,
Former Vicar & Archdeacon of Jaffna

Greetings from the Ven. S. J. Jeyaveerasingan

Former Vicar & Archdeacon of Jaffna

As the 9th Archdeacon of Jaffna (2012–2017), I have the great pleasure of responding to the request of Fr. Jebachelvan to send my greetings to the parish on the occasion of its 225th Anniversary.

When I was young, I studied a poem by Lord Tennyson, *The Brook*, which contains the famous line: "*Men may come and men may go, but I go on forever.*" This reflects a profound truth about the life of the Church, and in particular, St. John the Baptist Church, Chundikuli.

The history of St. John's Church bears witness to this enduring truth. Through times of peace and prosperity, as well as periods marked by war, destruction, loss of life, and suffering, the Church has remained steadfast in its mission and witness. It has continued to stand as a beacon of faith and hope to generations of worshippers.

St. John's Church has always maintained a close and meaningful relationship with St. John's College, Chundikuli Girls' College, and St. James' Church, Nallur. Although St. John's is situated in the heart of Chundikuli, it may rightly be regarded as the Anglican cathedral of Jaffna and its surrounding region because of its influence and ministry.

The beauty and strength of the Church have been enhanced by the institutions associated with it—St. John's College, Chundikuli Girls' College, Nuffield School, and Karuna Nilayam. These institutions have brought together people of all ages and from different religious backgrounds, fostering unity, service, and understanding within the community.

As we enter a new chapter in the life of the Church, may we, like Thomas in John 20:28, be ready to confess with conviction, "*My Lord and my God!*"

I take this opportunity to convey my best wishes and God's richest blessings to the Archdeacon, the Vicar, and the entire congregation as you celebrate this historic milestone.

Ven. S. J. Jeyaveerasingan,
Former Vicar & Archdeacon of Jaffna

Greetings from the Ven. Samuel J. Ponniah

Former Vicar & Archdeacon of Jaffna

My relationship with St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli (SJBCC) began in 1967, the year my father (Rev'd Canon Jubilee S Ponniah) was ordained as a deacon alongside the Rev'd Muthuveloe on December 21st. Although his ordination took place in Jaffna with the intention of him being stationed there, circumstances led him elsewhere. Decades later, during his 50th sacerdotal anniversary, I had the privilege of hosting a Thanksgiving Service, where the Rev. Jameson Gnanaponrajah preached, attended by the clergy of the Jaffna Archdeaconry. My father's influence on my life is profound—etched into my instincts and woven into my character in ways that are difficult to explain but impossible to ignore. I believe the pioneering work at Chundikuli by the Rev'd Christian David, who was born near Tranquebar in Tamil Nadu, shares a similarly deep and intrinsic connection with the parish.

Today, the SJBCC serves as the chapel for the two neighboring Anglican schools, with boarders and the parish community worshipping together on Sundays. During my time at the Chundikuli Vicarage, I met researcher Mark E. Balmforth, whose work explores the missionary efforts of Christian David at St. John's. Balmforth highlights that Rev'd David combined his pastoral duties with the management of an innovative educational institution, pioneering state-funded boarding education in early 19th-century Ceylon. This connection was further solidified in April 1814 with the establishment of a boarding school physically attached to the church. This school predates the Nallur Seminary that is now claimed to have been shifted to Chundikuli. The curriculum of the school at the parish of St. John's, run by the Rev'd David, was notably bilingual, using English and Tamil texts on alternating pages to teach both language skills and Christian principles. Balmforth affirms that his school and teaching made possible the rapid expansion of British and American missionaries in Jaffna.

Historically, Rev'd Christian David's work laid the groundwork for the modern administrative duties of an Archdeacon. Long before his formal Anglican ordination in 1824, he exercised structural influence by overseeing a network of thirty-six village schools across the Jaffna Peninsula from his base at St. John's. His responsibilities were both pastoral and juridical; he

managed Anglican churches, performed essential rites, and handled religious disputes for the government. By serving as the Preacher in the Malabar Language, he acted as a high-level intermediary, providing a pre-trained workforce of bilingual collaborators that ensured the success of subsequent foreign missions.

This spirit of collaboration continues today through ecumenical efforts, such as the culmination of Unity Week with a service involving even the Roman Catholic Bishop at SJBCC, the work of the Jaffna Christian Union and the shared governance of the Ashram at Maruthanarmadam. Historically, the Revd. David served as an early ecumenical advisor, guiding newly arrived missionaries in their Tamil studies and fostering community. White missionaries at the time needed wide networks of local intermediaries to translate and arrange every part of life, from housing to cooking and cleaning, to support preaching and communicating the message. The Rev'd Christian David's work created almost all of these which facilitated the Americans and British missionaries to "hit the ground running," Balmforth writes.

However, his legacy is not without complexity; Balmforth writes that he famously advocated for the preservation of caste distinctions within the church, viewing caste as a social rather than religious institution. During my own five-year ministry, I observed lingering undercurrents of caste consciousness. Many visitors mourned that the parish was "not like before," implying that shifts in the social and caste composition of leadership—often a result of post-independence migration due to oppressive state policies and ethnic conflict—had altered the traditional fabric of the church.

In reflecting on my ministry and the pioneering work of the Rev'd Christian David, I see an urgent need to reclaim and uphold the missional, educational, and administrative legacy of the parish of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli. It is my hope that the parish continues to be a vessel for this vision, and I wish the community God's enduring presence and blessings as you celebrate another milestone in 2026.

With prayers and blessings,

Ven. Samuel J. Ponniah,
Former Vicar & Archdeacon of Jaffna

Greetings from the Rev. Bennett Balasingh

Former Vicar

It gives me immense pleasure to write this message on the commemoration of the 225th anniversary of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli.

During the course of my pastoral ministry in Colombo, I was approached by the then Bishop of Colombo, the Right Rev Jabez J. Gnanapragasam, who informed me that he was looking for an ordained priest to proceed to Jaffna and minister at St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli for one year, and whether I would like to take up the appointment. This was during the height of the war in Jaffna, and I told him I would consult my wife Julie and let him know. At that time, both my daughters had commenced working in Colombo, and my wife Julie immediately agreed that I should accept the Bishop's request and go to Jaffna, and that she would stay in Colombo to look after our daughters.

I initially proceeded to Jaffna by myself, flying from Ratmalana to Jaffna in January 1990. Upon arrival I proceeded to conduct worship services at St. John the Baptist's Church and at St. John's College in Chundikuli. My wife Julie, my elderly mother and another elderly relative joined me within about a month of my stay in Jaffna and stayed with me for the rest of the year. This was a disturbing, fearful, and turbulent time when daily overhead bombings were being carried out by the SL Airforce, and most houses had underground bunkers built by the owners where people would run into for shelter, sometimes even during the worship services. However, Julie and I trusted that God sent us to Jaffna for a purpose and never sheltered in a bunker during our stay.

Another endearing memory that has stayed with us so many years after we left Jaffna on completion of that hard and difficult year, was the love, care, provision, and friendship shown to us by the parishioners. We remember before God the members of many faithful families who joined us for worship services every Sunday and ensured that worship services never ceased. We made many friends during the time we served at St. John's and some parishioners have even visited us here in Melbourne. At the end of that year, we were asked to return to Colombo and left Jaffna on the pillions of bicycles, by buses and other means. All those memories are in the past now, but poignant reminders of the faithfulness of God.

Upon returning to Colombo I was sent to Christ Church, Dickoya, and Rev Nesakumar took over at St. John's.

We join with you all in praising God for His faithfulness to the people of Jaffna through the ministry of the Church of St. John the Baptist during the last 225 years, and especially so during the last fifty years, and pray that God will continue to use the church mightily in the furtherance of His Kingdom in the years to come.

May God continue to bless you all.

Rev. Bennett Balasingh,
Former Vicar

Greetings from the Rev. N. Jameson Gnanaponrajah

Former Vicar

I thank and praise Almighty God for the life and witness of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli, which has faithfully borne witness to the calling of our Lord Jesus Christ through its worship, ministry, and service to the people of God.

When I joined St. John's College Hostel at the age of nine, St. John the Baptist's Church became my spiritual mother. Our Chaplain and Hostel Warden, Rev. Bala Arulpragasam, whom we affectionately called "*Uncle,*" together with his wife, "*Auntie Bala,*" lovingly nurtured our spiritual lives. They ensured that we attended the 7.00 a.m. Tamil Service and the 5.00 p.m. English Service every Sunday, dressed neatly in our school uniforms.

They carefully prepared us for worship—from making sure our clothes were neat to reminding us to bring our offerings: three cents for the Tamil Service, two cents for Sunday School, and five cents for the English Service. (At that time, the bus fare from the Kachcheri to Jaffna town was only three cents.) They also encouraged us to memorise Bible verses for Sunday School and to learn English hymns for the evening service. Those formative years laid a firm spiritual foundation for my Christian life.

The late Rev. A. J. C. Selvaratnam, then Vicar of the parish, prepared me for Confirmation, deepening my faith before I was confirmed in St. John the Baptist's Church.

Rev. John Isaiah, affectionately known as "*Kutti Pothagar,*" encouraged me to preach and conduct Bible studies, nurturing my gifts for Christian ministry.

Rev. J. Sarvananthan trained me in lay leadership, Sunday School teaching, and service on the Church Committee. He also recommended me to be licensed to serve at the altar and assist in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

Rev. Bennett Balasingh blessed my engagement to Eva.
The Ven. S. P. Nesakumar solemnised our wedding, and the Rt. Rev. Kenneth Fernando baptised our eldest daughter in this very church.

My beloved mother now rests in the church cemetery (*Kallarai Thottam*). May she rest in peace and rise in glory.

Looking back over the years, I realise that St. John the Baptist's Church has been the constant thread running through my entire spiritual journey. From the age of nine, when I first entered its doors as a hostel student, to my Confirmation, my growth in Christian faith, my training as a lay leader and preacher, my engagement, my marriage, the baptism of my eldest daughter, my mother's final resting place in the church cemetery, and ultimately my appointment as Vicar of this beloved parish, every significant milestone of my life has been closely intertwined with this Church. It has truly been my spiritual home—a place where I was nurtured, guided, equipped for ministry, and continually strengthened in my walk with Christ. For these countless blessings and cherished memories, I shall remain ever grateful to Almighty God.

I thank God for giving me the privilege of serving St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli, as its Vicar from 2004 to 2006. I remember with deep gratitude the Rt. Rev. Duleep de Chickera, who instituted me as Vicar of this parish—a place where I had been nurtured, formed, and prepared for ministry, and from which God eventually called me to serve as Principal of St. John's College, Jaffna.

Even after my retirement, I continue to thank God for His abundant blessings and for enabling me to serve the people throughout the Northern Province.

As the Church celebrates its 225th Anniversary, I pray that Almighty God will continue to bless every member of this parish and the generations to come. May they remain steadfast in their faith, walk faithfully in the Word of God, and continue the rich Christian witness of this historic Church.

With prayers and blessings,

Rev. N. Jameson Gnanaponrajah,
Former Vicar (2004–2006) /
Former Principal, St. John's College, Jaffna

Greetings from Mr. V. S. B. Thuseetharan,
The Principal of St. John's College, Jaffna

I take this opportunity to extend my warmest greetings and heartfelt congratulations to the community of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli, Jaffna, on the joyous celebration of its 225th Anniversary.

For two hundred and twenty-five years, this church has been a beacon of faith, hope and Christian witness, preaching the Gospel and ministering to the people of God with steadfast commitment. Through changing times and challenging circumstances, it has remained a centre of spiritual nourishment and a source of compassion and service to the wider community.

This celebration is especially meaningful to our college as our school has had a cherished partnership with the church for 203 years. It has played a vital role in nurturing the spiritual lives of our students and in instilling in them the enduring values of faith, integrity, compassion and social responsibility. This precious partnership has enriched generations of students, forming them into people committed to serving both God and society.

As the parish celebrates this remarkable milestone, I pray that Almighty God will continue to bless St. John the Baptist's Church with His abundant grace, strengthen its mission and inspire future generations to remain steadfast in faith and generous in service. May the partnership between our church and college continue to flourish and bear rich fruit for many years to come.

V. S. B. Thuseetharan,
Principal,
St. John's College,
Jaffna

Greetings from Mrs. D. Thuseetharan,
The Principal of Chundikuli Girls' College, Jaffna

It is a great honour to contribute a message to the 225th Anniversary Commemorative Volume published to celebrate the 225th Anniversary of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli.

The Church of St. John the Baptist has been the cornerstone of spiritual guidance not only for the local community but also for our college since its inception. The role of this church in teaching God's Word and shaping the character and faith of our students is invaluable. The weekly services held for the students of St. John's College and Chundikuli Girls' College help our students learn biblical values and apply them in their daily lives from a young age. The Vicar of the Church of St. John the Baptist, has always been and continues to be an important and distinguished person in the life of the school, offering pastoral support.

I thank God Almighty for His loving faithfulness to the Church of St. John the Baptist and for all who have served in this church throughout the past 225 years. I pray that God will continue to bless and guide the church to bring glory and honour to Him through faithful service.

Mrs. D. Thuseetharan,
Principal,
Chundikuli Girls' College,
Jaffna

Message from the Rev. S. Stephen Jebachelvan

Vicar, St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli

"Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 118:1

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It is with profound gratitude to God that we celebrate the 225th Anniversary of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli. This significant milestone provides us with an opportunity to remember God's unfailing faithfulness throughout the generations and to give thanks for the countless blessings bestowed upon our parish since its establishment.

For 225 years, St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli has stood as a beacon of Christian faith, worship, witness, and service in Jaffna. Through periods of joy and challenge, peace and uncertainty, the Lord has sustained His people and guided this parish in its mission to proclaim the Gospel of Christ and to serve the community with love and compassion.

As we reflect on our rich heritage, we honour the vision, sacrifice, and dedication of the clergy, lay leaders, parishioners, and benefactors who have faithfully nurtured this church and passed on the faith from one generation to another. Their commitment continues to inspire us as we carry forward the mission entrusted to us.

As we celebrate this historic occasion, let us renew our commitment to worship, fellowship, witness, and service, trusting that the God who has led us thus far will continue to guide and bless St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli for generations to come.

On behalf of the parish, I extend my sincere appreciation to all who have contributed to the preparation of this souvenir and to the success of our anniversary celebrations. May God's abundant blessings be upon us all.

Rev. S. Stephen Jebachelvan,
Vicar,
St. John the Baptist's Church,
Chundikuli, Jaffna

Editorial Reflections

"One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." Psalm 145:4

It is with profound gratitude to Almighty God that I present this 225th Anniversary Commemorative Volume of the Church of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli. This publication has been prepared to commemorate a remarkable milestone in the life of our Church—a journey spanning two hundred and twenty-five years of faithful worship, Christian witness, and dedicated service.

For over two centuries, St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli has remained a spiritual home to countless generations. It has stood as a beacon of faith in the Jaffna Peninsula, nurturing the spiritual lives of its congregation while making an enduring contribution to education, community life, and the wider mission of the Church. Through periods of peace and prosperity, as well as times of war, displacement, and hardship, God has sustained His people and preserved this historic parish.

This volume is more than a record of an anniversary celebration. It is a tribute to the faith, sacrifice, and commitment of those who have gone before us. The preceding pages contain messages of greetings from Bishops, Archdeacons, and Vicars whose ministries have shaped the life of this parish. Their reflections bear witness to the enduring influence of St. John the Baptist's Church and the cherished memories it continues to evoke.

A distinctive feature of this publication is the inclusion of the scholarly historical article by Dr. Napoleon Pathmanathan, whose meticulous research traces the origins and development of the Church through archival records, missionary writings, and historical sources. Together with the historical timeline, photographs, and documentary records, this souvenir seeks not only to celebrate our past but also to preserve it for future generations. It is our hope that this publication will serve as a valuable reference for historians, researchers, parishioners, and all who are interested in the history of Anglican Christianity in Jaffna.

Recognising the importance of preserving the collective memory of our parish, we issued an open appeal inviting both present and former parishioners, in Sri Lanka and overseas, to contribute old photographs,

historical documents, and personal recollections relating to the life and ministry of the Church. The response to this appeal has enriched this volume and ensured that the memories and legacy of earlier generations continue to inspire those who follow.

Every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this volume. Nevertheless, given the passage of time and the limited availability of some historical records, there may still be omissions or inadvertent inaccuracies. We would be grateful to receive any corrections, clarifications, or additional historical material that would enhance the accuracy and completeness of this work. Such contributions will be carefully reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated into the second edition of this publication, which will be published online.

As Editor, I record my sincere appreciation to the Vicar and the Wardens for entrusting me with the responsibility of editing this commemorative publication. I express my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Napoleon Pathmanathan for generously permitting the publication of his scholarly historical article and for his invaluable contribution to preserving the history of our Church. I also thank the Bishops, Archdeacons, Vicars, contributors, and all those who responded to our appeal by sharing their messages of greetings, historical documents, memories, and photographs.

Above all, we give thanks to Almighty God for His steadfast love and unfailing faithfulness throughout these 225 years. As we celebrate this historic milestone, may we be inspired by the example of those who have gone before us and renewed in our commitment to proclaim the Gospel, serve our neighbour, and bear faithful witness to Christ.

May the Church of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli continue to flourish under God's gracious hand and remain a beacon of faith, hope, and service for generations to come.

Dr. A. Harry Gnanarajan,
Editor - 225th Anniversary Commemorative Volume,
St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli

Programme of the 225th Anniversary Celebrations

225th
ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATIONS
1801 – 2026
St. John the Baptist's Church,
Chundikuli
SATURDAY, 8 AUGUST 2026
9:00 a.m.
Holy Eucharist
Giving thanks to God for 225 years of faithfulness.
11:00 a.m.
Honouring Former Vicars
Remembering their faithful service and spiritual leadership.
12:00 noon
Book Launch – Church History
The history of our Church: a heritage to be preserved.
12:30 p.m.
Anniversary Cultural Programme by the Youths
Celebrating our faith and heritage through talents and creativity.
1:00 p.m.
Fellowship Lunch
Sharing our joy and strengthening our bonds as one family in Christ.
"Great is the Lord and most worthy of praise."
Psalm 145:3
CELEBRATING OUR HERITAGE • FAITH • COMMUNITY • HOPE

Then and Now: St. John the Baptist's Church through the Years

The Church during the period of Rev. Christian David (1801-1841)

The Church in 2026

Parishioners of the Church in 2026

Historical Timeline:

225 Years of Faith and Worship (1801–2026)

Portuguese Period

16th Century
The **Church of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli** was established during the Portuguese period as one of the Roman Catholic churches serving the Jaffna Kingdom.

Dutch Period – 1658
Following the Dutch conquest of Jaffna, the church came under the administration of the Dutch Reformed Church. Rev. Philippus Baldaeus supervised Protestant work throughout the peninsula.

British Administration

1796
The British assumed control of Ceylon from the Dutch. Former Portuguese and Dutch churches, including St. John's, gradually fell into neglect owing to the absence of Anglican clergy.

1798
Frederick North became the first British Governor of Ceylon.

1800
Governor North visited Jaffna, investigated the condition of Christianity in the peninsula, and requested that a suitable missionary be sent to revive the work.

Arrival of Christian David

1 January 1801
Acting Collector Gahagan invited Christian David of Tranquebar to serve as preacher and Superintendent of Schools in Jaffna.

18 February 1801
Christian David departed from Nagapattinam for Ceylon.

20 February 1801
Christian David landed at Kayts.

22 February 1801
Christian David arrived in Jaffna.

28 February 1801
Governor Frederick North appointed Christian David as Government (State) Preacher and Superintendent of forty-seven schools in Jaffna and Mannar.

Beginning of Anglican Worship

20–22 December 1801
Through the intervention of Colonel Barbet, St. John's Church was restored for Christian worship after having fallen into disuse.

23 December 1801
Christian David received the keys of St. John's Church from Colonel Barbet.

24 December 1801 (Christmas Eve)
Christian David conducted the first Anglican service in St. John's Church, preaching from Philippians 4:4: *"Rejoice in the Lord always."* This event marks the beginning of continuous Anglican worship at Chundikuli.

Growth of the Mission

1805
Christian David undertook repairs to the old church through public contributions and personal sacrifice.

1814
Christian David preached in Colombo before Governor Sir Robert Brownrigg and senior colonial officials, demonstrating the growing influence of Tamil Anglican ministry.

1817
His Tamil translation of the Anglican Liturgy (Book of Common Prayer) was printed and distributed throughout Ceylon and South India.

1824
Christian David was ordained by Bishop Reginald Heber**.**

Church Missionary Society Era

September 1841
Christian David retired after approximately forty years of ministry. St. John's Church was entrusted to the Church Missionary Society (CMS).

1842
Rev. J. T. Johnston assumed charge of the Chundikuli Mission and Seminary.

1846
Bishop James Chapman visited Jaffna, confirmed candidates at Chundikuli and ordained clergy despite the severe cholera epidemic.

1849
Members of the congregation established a Native Missionary Agency to assist the missionary work of the Church.

Present Church Building

1859–1862
The old church was demolished to accommodate a new road, and a new church building was erected by the Government.

11 December 1862
Rev. Robert Pargiter records the opening of the new church.

Historical Note: Contemporary sources differ regarding the consecration date. The Ceylon Churchman records 14 May 1862, while F. Lorenz Beven records 14 August 1862. Until further archival evidence emerges, the exact consecration date should be regarded as uncertain.

Indigenous Anglican Leadership

1863
John Hensman was ordained deacon, becoming the first native minister associated with the Jaffna Mission.

13 August 1865
John Hensman was ordained priest, together with the ordination of three native deacons, marking a major step in the development of indigenous Anglican leadership in Jaffna.

1870
Formation of the Native Church Council and Native Church Fund strengthened local ecclesiastical leadership and pastoral responsibility.

Native Missionary Association

1895
The Jaffna CMS Native Missionary Association expanded evangelistic work into Pallai, Poonaryn and the Wanni.

1896–1901
Tamil Christians increasingly financed missionary work, reflecting the growth of an indigenous missionary movement.

1909
The Association continued vigorous evangelistic ministry under Tamil leadership.

Twentieth Century

Early Twentieth Century
Leadership of the Anglican Church in Jaffna increasingly passed into the hands of indigenous clergy, with no resident European district missionary.

1925
The church was re-roofed with tiles.

1964
The church was extended and renovated.

Twenty-first Century

2001
The parish celebrated 200 years of continuous Anglican worship, commemorating the first service conducted by Christian David on Christmas Eve 1801.

8 August 2026
The parish celebrates the 225th Anniversary of Anglican worship at the Church of St. John the Baptist, Chundikuli, giving thanks to Almighty God for more than two centuries of faithful worship, witness, education, evangelism, and service.

Mission of the Church Missionary Society and the Native Missionary Association

Dr. Napoleon Pathmanathan
B.Th., M.Th., Ph.D.

About the Author: *Dr. Napoleon Pathmanathan is a distinguished Sri Lankan theologian, mission historian, author, and educator. A former Senior Lecturer and currently an Adjunct Faculty Member of the Colombo Theological Seminary, he has devoted more than three decades to theological education, mission research, and leadership development in Sri Lanka and South India. He is widely recognised for his scholarly contributions to the history of the CMS and SPG missions in Ceylon and Tamil Christianity. His extensive research and publications have made a significant contribution to the study of the Christian heritage of Sri Lanka.*

Rev. Christian David of St. John's Church Jaffna – Colonial Chaplain Portuguese Church

The Catholic Church in Jaffna during the Portuguese period was organised into four major administrative divisions: Valikamam, Thenmarachchi, Vadamarachchi, and Pachilaipalli. Within these divisions, the Church maintained a network of twenty-six churches, one of which was the **Church of St. John the Baptist** in Chundikuli, located in the Valikamam division. This ecclesiastical structure reflected the strong missionary presence established by the Portuguese across the Jaffna Peninsula (Somaratna 2016, 174).

Dutch Church

However, this arrangement changed dramatically in 1658, when the Dutch conquered the peninsula. With the fall of Portuguese power, all twenty-six Catholic churches, including the **Church of St. John the Baptist** in Chundikuli, were brought under Dutch administration. The Dutch Reformed Church became the dominant religious authority, and Rev. Philippus Baldaeus, one of the most influential Dutch missionaries of the period, was appointed as the minister in charge of the entire peninsula. Under Dutch rule, Catholic institutions were suppressed, and Protestant missionary activity was promoted as part of the colonial religious policy (Somaratna 2016, 232).

Anglican Church

A second major transition occurred in 1796, when the British supplanted the Dutch in Ceylon. Although the churches now fell under British administration, the colonial government faced an immediate challenge: there were no ordained ministers available to provide pastoral care or conduct divine services for the British officials stationed in the northern districts. With no clergy to maintain them, many of the former Dutch and earlier Portuguese churches were effectively abandoned, left unused and deteriorating. This absence of pastoral oversight left the religious life of the region, already weakened, in a state of deep neglect.

When Frederick North, the Earl of Guilford, assumed office as the first British Governor of Ceylon in 1798, he quickly recognised the deteriorated condition of religious instruction throughout the island, including Jaffna. Determined to address the issue, he visited Jaffna in 1800, formed a committee to investigate the situation, and formally requested that a suitable preacher be sent to the Northern Province. This request set in motion a significant development in the history of Protestant missions in Jaffna.

Christian David, then serving in the Danish-controlled Fort of Tranquebar, was identified as a suitable candidate. Acting on the Governor's directive, Mr. Gahagan, the Acting Collector of Jaffna, wrote a letter dated 1 January 1801 inviting Christian David to take up missionary work in the peninsula. Responding to this appeal, the Lutheran ministers in Tanjore, Rev. Kohloff and Rev. Jaerricke, agreed to send Christian David as both a preacher of the Gospel and the Superintendent of Schools in Jaffna.

Christian David's responsibilities extended beyond Jaffna town. He ministered to British colonial officers stationed in Mannar and other outlying areas, becoming one of the earliest Protestant ministers to serve under British authority in northern Ceylon (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 169–171).

Christian David embarked on his journey from the port of Nagapattinam, arrived in Kayts on 20 February 1801, and reached Jaffna on 22 February. Shortly thereafter, Governor Frederick North formally appointed him, through a letter dated 28 February 1801, as a minister and the Superintendent of forty-seven schools established for the education of native children in Jaffna and Mannar, regions that had previously been under Dutch control. This appointment marked the beginning of a new

phase in the religious and educational landscape of the Jaffna Peninsula, laying the groundwork for the later expansion of Protestant missions in the north (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 169–171).

He noted that during the Dutch period, the Presbyterian minister conducted divine services at the old St. John's Church in Chundikuli, built during the Portuguese period, about a mile from the Pettah. After the British took control of Ceylon, Colonel Barbut was appointed Commandant of the Jaffna Fort and Commissioner Extraordinary for the Northern Province, from Chilaw to Batticaloa. The Colonel took possession of St. John's Church, whose roof had fallen into disrepair, and used the building to keep his cattle. Trusting in God's promises and believing that divine intervention could influence the Colonel's heart, he resolved to visit St. John's Church every evening to pray that the building would be entrusted to him so that he might preach the Gospel there (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 172).

On 20 December 1801, around six in the evening, he went with his cousin Josephpulle to St. John's Church and quietly opened the vestry door, where animals were kept. When the sheep began to bleat, they knelt, and he prayed that the Colonel's heart might be moved to hand over the church for preaching the Gospel. In their haste after praying, they forgot to close the door. The following evening, at the same hour, he returned with his cousin and found the door firmly bolted. Assuming the shepherd had secured it, they entered the church through a north side window. As he knelt in prayer, a sudden bright light appeared near the pulpit on the east side. After finishing his prayer, he told his cousin what he had seen. Although his cousin had not witnessed the light, he encouraged him, saying it was a good sign and that they should continue praying until they gained possession of the church (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 172–173).

On 22 December, as he and his cousin approached the south side door of the church, Colonel Barbut came from his nearby residence, later purchased by the Government and used as the Kachcheri, and asked him to inform the shepherd that the sheep should be brought to the Fort the next morning, where a new place would be provided for them. The Colonel also instructed him to call at the Kachcheri, as he intended to hand over the church to his care and would even provide prisoners to help clean it. Overwhelmed with gratitude, he immediately offered prayers of thanksgiving, praising God with the words of Psalm 103 and blessing the Lord for His mercies and deliverance (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 167).

On the morning of 23 December, he went to the Kachcheri in the Fort, where Colonel Barbut handed him the keys to St. John's Church. The Colonel instructed his peons to have the church thoroughly cleaned by prisoners and issued a general notice throughout the districts of Jaffna and Mannar announcing that he had been appointed by the Government as a licensed preacher of the Gospel. The notice also informed the public that anyone seeking marriage or baptism for their children could now apply to him (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 167).

On the evening of 24 December, Christmas Eve, Christian David preached for the first time in St. John's Church, choosing Philippians 4:4, **"Rejoice in the Lord always,"** as the text for the occasion. People from various backgrounds attended the service, including two Hindu scholars who had studied under the renowned missionaries Schwartz and Jaerricke (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 167–168).

When Rev. Dr. Claudius Buchannan visited Jaffna and attended St. John's Church, he recorded the following testimony of Christian David's work (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 173):

> "*The only Protestant preacher in the town of Jaffna is Christian David, a Hindu catechist sent over by the missionaries of Tranquebar. His chief ministrations are in the Tamil tongue, but he sometimes preaches in the English language, which he speaks with tolerable propriety, and the Dutch and English resort to hear him. I went with the rest to his church, where he delivered extempore a very excellent discourse, which His present Majesty, George III, would not have disdained to hear. And this Hindu supports the interests of the English Church in this province of Jaffna.*"

In 1805, the old St. John's Church was in a state of decay, a condition he brought to the Colonel's attention. Although only a small amount of money was raised through public subscription, he continued the repairs using his own resources, trusting in the blessings God had given him (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 135).

Ordination

Christian David received ordination from Bishop Heber in 1824 and was regarded as the first native of Ceylon to be ordained as an Anglican priest. Beven described him as a leading figure who was granted the title "Reverend." He served as a colonial chaplain, primarily ministering to the Tamil-speaking Colombo Chetty community at St. Thomas' Church in

Ginthupitiya (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 132). He was respected and beloved by all, and was admitted into Holy Orders by Bishop Heber at St. John's Cathedral, Calcutta (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 136).

Itinerant Ministry

On 1 January 1814, he preached at the Wolfendale Church, choosing 1 Corinthians 7:31, **"For the fashion of this world passeth away,"** as his text. Many members of the Chetty community and people from various backgrounds attended the service.

During his stay in Colombo, he spent much of his time visiting Chetty families, offering exhortation and prayer, and informing them that a special divine service would be held for them at St. Peter's Church in the Fort on 9 February 1814. On that date, he had the satisfaction of preaching in St. Peter's Church before the Governor and other officials, an event later reported in the *Ceylon Gazette* (No. 647).

"On the evening of 9 February 1814 at seven o'clock, the Rev. Christian David, the Malabar preacher from Jaffna, conducted divine service and preached in the Fort Church, taking Matthew 9:36 as his text. He delivered both the sermon and the prayers in Tamil, using a direct translation of the English liturgy. The service was attended by Governor Sir Robert Brownrigg, Chief Justice Johnston, Viscount Molesworth, the Rev. Dr. Twisleton, their families, Mr. Bisset, and the Sinhalese and Tamil preachers of Colombo, along with a large civil and military congregation. The church was filled mainly by Protestant Chetty families, for whom the service had been arranged. This community, numbering about five hundred, had long lived in Colombo and its surroundings and formed a distinct group united by their adherence to Protestantism, intermarriage, and close neighbourhood ties. A former pupil of the venerable Schwartz, Christian David preached with such clarity and expressive delivery that even those unfamiliar with Tamil sensed the power and appropriateness of his message. The gathering—European and Asian Christians worshipping together—created a striking and memorable scene" (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 176–177).

In many instances during his visits to Colombo, he also ministered to churches along the coastal regions, including Mannar, Kalpitiya, Chilaw, Negombo, Dandugama, and other nearby areas (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 177–180, 184). During his visits to Colombo, he

also ministered to the congregation at St. Thomas' Church in Ginthupitiya and, on some occasions, at the washers' quarters in Kelwatte (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 182).

Tamil Liturgy and Literary Work

In 1805, he became well acquainted with Sir Alexander Johnston, the Chief Justice of Ceylon, for whom he translated several important Tamil works, including a treatise on the names, characteristics, and medicinal properties of Indian plants. He also assisted as an interpreter in the Supreme Court during major trials. Sir Alexander placed great trust in him and consistently supported his reasonable proposals and efforts aimed at advancing Christianity in Ceylon (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 172).

He noted that although the Church of England's liturgy had not yet been printed in Tamil, he consistently read from his own translation during worship. From his youth, he had admired the structure and spirit of the English liturgy, regarding it as the purest and most reliable form of public worship, and he longed to make such a book available in Tamil for his "benighted countrymen." In time, he was able to translate the entire liturgy into Tamil. Sir Robert Brownrigg, a strong supporter of the Church, took the manuscript and presented it to the first Bishop of India, Dr. Middleton, during the Bishop's visit to Colombo. At the Governor's request, 5,000 copies were printed at Serampore at his expense. The work was completed in 1817 and distributed among Christians in Ceylon and on the Coromandel Coast. He observed that several later attempts were made to replace his version, but the variations among these translations prevented the kind of uniformity found in the English liturgy. He expressed his hope that a single, authoritative Tamil version would eventually be adopted for use throughout the island, including Jaffna.

Retirement of Rev. Christian David

He continued, with God's help, to preach regularly in St. John's Church throughout his years in Jaffna until his retirement on pension in September 1841. After his retirement, the church was handed over to the Church Missionary Society, yet he still occasionally performed ministerial duties there whenever his health allowed, at the request of the stationed missionary (Napoleon Pathmanathan and G. P. V. Somaratna 2013, 167–168).

In retrospect, his long ministry revealed a life shaped by perseverance, devotion, and an unwavering commitment to the spiritual and educational uplift of the Tamil-speaking communities of Ceylon. From securing St. John's Church through persistent prayer, to preaching across the island's coastal regions, to translating the Anglican liturgy into Tamil for the first time, his work consistently bridged cultures, languages, and traditions. His influence extended beyond the pulpit—into the courts, into the homes of the Colombo Chetties, and into the broader missionary enterprise supported by colonial administrators and church leaders. Though later translations and reforms emerged, his pioneering efforts laid the foundation for Tamil Anglican worship and contributed significantly to the growth of Protestant Christianity on the island. His legacy endured not only in the institutions he served but also in the communities that continued to draw strength from his ministry long after his retirement.

Jaffna Peninsula

The Jaffna Peninsula, extending roughly twenty miles from north to south and thirty-six miles from east to west, was a densely populated region with about 215,000 inhabitants. It was divided into thirty-seven divisions, each containing several villages. Within this ecclesiastical landscape, the Church Missionary Society held responsibility for three divisions and their associated schools. The American missionaries, who had entered the field earlier and operated on a larger scale, occupied five divisions, with eight to ten missionaries spread across extensive areas of the district. The Methodist mission maintained work in three additional divisions, contributing to a diverse and active missionary presence across the peninsula. This distribution of missionary agencies shaped the religious, educational, and social character of nineteenth-century Jaffna, creating a complex network of overlapping influences and institutional commitments (R. Pargiter 1852, 140).

During the periods of Portuguese and Dutch rule, the colonial administrations imposed policies that restricted the practice of native religions and compelled the population to adopt forms of Christianity sanctioned by the state. These coercive measures created deep resentment towards the Christian faith, as conversion was often associated with political pressure rather than personal conviction. As a result, when voluntary missionary work began in the nineteenth century, the progress of genuine conversions was slow. In contrast to regions where Christianity had spread through persuasion rather than compulsion, the mission in Jaffna faced the lingering effects of earlier forced conversions, which had left the

local population wary and distrustful of missionary efforts (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1853, 140; Pathmanathan 1999, 8).

Rev. J.T. Johnston (1842-1848)

After the retirement of Rev. Christian David, Rev. J. T. Johnston was appointed to the Chundikuli congregation in September 1842 (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1844). Johnston reported that there were fourteen congregations in Jaffna, with a total of thirty-three communicants. The converts, he observed, displayed marked changes in character, and those around them testified to the transformation in their lives. One notable example was a man formerly known for theft and cruelty who, after his conversion and baptism, became a living witness to the power of the Gospel preached by the missionaries. Johnston also recorded that the district contained twenty-three schools, enrolling 1,056 boys and 99 girls, bringing the total number of students to 1,155 (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1843, 80–81).

Johnston was placed in charge of the seminary near St. John's Church in Chundikuli, where catechists, teachers, and assistants were trained (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1844, 88–90). By 1845, the number of the congregation had risen to ninety-one. Yet his report was not encouraging: the apathy of nominal Christians and of their descendants deeply troubled him. This spiritual indifference led him to appeal to Christians in London, urging them to pray for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit to bring about genuine conversion among the people (Johnston 1846, 92–93).

At the close of 1845, Rev. Johnston was compelled to leave the station and return to England in order to accompany his wife, whose health had been severely affected by the tropical climate. Europeans frequently struggled to endure the harsh conditions of the northern districts, and her illness was neither unexpected nor uncommon. Around the same time, William Adley, his contemporary serving at St. James' Church in Nallur, was likewise forced to depart for England due to a similar deterioration in his wife's health. Their simultaneous departures left the mission stations without ordained leadership for many months, creating a prolonged period of uncertainty until the eventual arrival of Rev. Pargiter and Rev. O'Neill, who restored regular ministerial oversight (Adley 1847, 98–100).

These difficulties were further intensified by a severe outbreak of cholera that ravaged the district for several months. The epidemic claimed nearly one-tenth of the population, and in many cases entire families perished

within only a few days. Remarkably, the girls' boarding school at Nallur and the seminary at Chundikuli were preserved without any loss of life among their students or staff. Public life, however, came to a standstill. Both the Tamil and English day schools were closed, road works and other public projects were suspended, and government offices, including the courts of justice, ceased operations. Even the sittings of the Supreme Court were postponed until the district could recover from the devastation of the epidemic. This period marked one of the most challenging chapters in the history of the mission, as illness, climate, and the epidemic combined to halt nearly every aspect of religious, educational, and civil activity in the region (Adley 1847, 98–100).

Bishop James Chapman visited Jaffna in 1846 and reported that the epidemic had swept away nearly 11,000 people. During this time, Rev. Pargiter ministered to the congregations in Nallur and Chundikuli until Rev. O'Neill arrived. The Bishop conducted confirmations at each station: in English at Chundikuli for 56 candidates and in Tamil at Nallur for 54 candidates. Rev. Pargiter served as the Bishop's interpreter. He ordained O'Neill to the priesthood and Gordon to the diaconate at St. John's Church, Chundikuli (Adley 1847, 100).

When Rev. Johnston returned from London in September 1847, he found that the congregation had declined during the long interval in which no resident missionaries had been present. The absence of pastoral oversight, combined with the disruptions caused by illness and the recent cholera epidemic, had weakened the spiritual life of the community. His return therefore marked the beginning of a renewed effort to restore regular ministry and rebuild the congregation after this period of neglect and instability (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1847, 132).

Adley reported that the epidemic claimed nearly one-tenth of the population, and in many cases entire families perished within only a few days. Remarkably, the girls' boarding school at Nallur and the seminary at Chundikuli were preserved without any loss of life among their students or staff. Public life, however, came to a standstill. Both the Tamil and English day schools were closed, road works and other public projects were suspended, and government offices, including the courts of justice, ceased operations. Even the sittings of the Supreme Court were postponed until the district could recover from the devastation of the epidemic. This period marked one of the most challenging chapters in the history of the mission, as illness, climate, and the epidemic combined to halt nearly every aspect of religious, educational, and civil activity in the region (Adley 1847, 98–100).

Bishop James Chapman, who visited Jaffna in 1846, also reported that the epidemic had swept away nearly 11,000 people (Adley 1847, 100). However, when he visited Jaffna again in 1847, he baptised one hundred and thirteen candidates (Balding 1922, 91).

During this period, both missionaries suffered personal tragedy. Mrs. O'Neill at Nallur and Mrs. Pargiter at Kopay died, leaving their husbands bereaved in the midst of their demanding work. The loss of their wives added a heavy emotional burden to an already difficult season in the mission's history, marked by illness, instability, and the lingering effects of the recent cholera epidemic (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1849). The missionaries' report states:

> *"We have to prepare this report with a dark cloud hanging over our prospects. All our fond expectations have been mysteriously blighted, and, according to human calculation, the interest of the mission thrown into the background. Our spirits are damped, and our hopes disappointed; but we trust our love for the work is not diminished, nor our faith in the goodness of our Heavenly Father, and His promises with regard to the establishment of His kingdom, in the least degree lessened. These serve to remind us more fully that the work is the work of God, that He will have all honour of it, and that he is able to carry it on in the inscrutable, but wise, arrangements of His providence…"* (Johnston, Chundikuli Report 1849, 152).

After Rev. Johnston's return, the congregation experienced a period of rapid growth. His renewed presence brought stability and pastoral oversight that had been absent during the months without a resident missionary. Yet this revival occurred alongside a significant structural change within the mission. The Society, reassessing its priorities, decided to reduce the overall number of schools in the district. Rather than maintaining a wide network for the sake of numerical reach, it chose to retain only the most efficient and academically sound institutions. This shift reflected a broader strategic move towards strengthening educational quality over quantity. The combination of renewed ministerial leadership and a more focused educational policy helped re-establish order after years marked by illness, missionary absences, and the disruptions of the cholera epidemic. It also laid the groundwork for a more sustainable model of mission work in the northern districts (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1849, 152–153).

Native members of the congregation founded a mission agency to support missionary activities in the district. They raised funds, provided logistical assistance, and organised themselves with the sole purpose of strengthening the missionary cause. This indigenous body met regularly with the missionaries in the area, creating a pattern of cooperation that blended local initiative with missionary oversight. Because the aims of this organisation aligned closely with the broader vision of the Church Missionary Society, which sought to establish an indigenous mission administered by native Christians, the missionaries had no hesitation in supporting its efforts. The agency represented a congregational expression of the CMS ideal: a locally rooted Christian community taking responsibility for the advancement of the Gospel in its own region (Johnston, *Chundikuli Report* 1849, 154).

Rev. Robert Pargiter (1850-1864)

Rev. Robert Pargiter, who had originally come out as a Wesleyan missionary but later left that body, was ordained deacon in 1846 and priest in 1847 by Bishop Chapman. He joined the missionary band in 1846 and spent the greater part of his service at Chundikuli until his retirement to England in 1864. He died there in 1915 at the age of ninety-eight (Balding 1922, 91).

A slow but steady growth of the congregation followed, marked by ten adult baptisms of new converts. Although the numerical increase was modest, many testified to the visible spiritual growth within the community, noting a deepening seriousness and sincerity among its members. Yet this period of encouragement was soon overshadowed by a severe trial. An open act of sin committed by a catechist, a man in whom the Society had placed considerable confidence, brought distress and disappointment to the station. The incident tested the resilience of the congregation and the missionaries alike, reminding them of the fragility of human character even among those entrusted with spiritual leadership (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1850, 169).

Rev. Pargiter reported that the seminary continued to make steady progress, and several of the students received financial support from the English residents of the district. At the time of the Bishop's visitation in August, four students were preparing for baptism, and ten others received confirmation. These developments, he noted, reflected both the strengthening of the institution and the growing seriousness of the students in their spiritual formation (R. R. Pargiter 1852).

According to the *Jaffna Report* of 1855, the Society offered a sober reflection on the results of its forty years of ministry in the peninsula. It acknowledged that many converts had received employment and various advantages through their association with the mission. A considerable number had embraced Christianity through Christian education and had become educated, enlightened, and outwardly aligned with the faith, yet not inwardly converted. Many believed for a time, but in moments of temptation they fell away, exposing the instability of their commitment. The report stated that a crisis had arisen within the mission community. This period revealed troubling instances of hypocrisy, malignity, selfishness, and mercenary conduct among some who had professed the faith. The discovery of such attitudes caused deep concern among the missionaries. Convinced that the work in Jaffna had become "fruitless," the missionaries on the ground proposed that the Society should end its mission in the peninsula and transfer its labour either to Tinnevelly or to another part of the island where more promising results might be expected. However, the mission secretary firmly rejected this suggestion. He argued that in a mission already forty years old, periods of decline, disappointment, and moral failure were not unusual. Such downfalls, he insisted, could be expected from time to time in any long-established work. Rather than abandoning the field, he urged perseverance, renewed spiritual discipline, and deeper pastoral engagement, trusting that genuine transformation would emerge despite temporary setbacks (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1855, 141).

A Jaffna Christian had remarked that "he would find the Jaffna soil particularly hard." By this he meant, of course, spiritually hard. As one of the pastors had put it, "the non-Christians are Gospel-hardened." The Gospel had already been fully proclaimed throughout the region, yet the people remained unmoved, their hearts seemingly unresponsive to its call. In reflecting on this, he observed that what was now required was not further proclamation but the power of the Holy Ghost—a divine awakening capable of stirring the conscience, breaking through long-standing resistance, and freeing the people from the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Only such a spiritual outpouring, he believed, could soften the hardened soil and bring about genuine transformation (Gleaner, September 1897).

In 1855, another severe outbreak of cholera swept through the Jaffna Peninsula, prevailing for nearly six months and carrying away large numbers of people from the mission field (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1855, 141). Rev. Robert Pargiter reported that this epidemic, which had begun the previous year, continued unabated until April 1856. An estimated 20,000 inhabitants were swept away, while many others were left blind,

lame, or mentally deranged, tragic survivors who became objects of pity and commiseration throughout the district. The mission itself suffered heavy losses. One of its most valued assistants, Abraham of Kopay, died during the epidemic, as did four schoolmasters, six members of the mission, and nearly one hundred schoolchildren. Under such overwhelming conditions, mission work had to be abandoned for several months, and all schools were closed. The missionaries, who had never before faced a calamity combining both cholera and famine, found themselves in an unprecedented struggle. They were compelled to devote their energies to treating the sick, comforting the dying, and burying the dead. Their usual pastoral and educational duties were replaced by the grim necessities of relief work, as the epidemic reshaped every aspect of life in the mission stations (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1856, 149).

Rev. Pargiter observed that one of the greatest difficulties faced by the mission was the selection of truly pious candidates for ministry. From past experience, he noted that individuals who lacked genuine spiritual commitment often became a burden rather than a blessing to the work. Candidates who were not deeply spiritually minded, he warned, proved to be a curse to the mission, undermining its progress and weakening its moral integrity. His remarks reflected the broader concern within the Society about ensuring that those entrusted with leadership possessed both sincerity of faith and stability of character (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1856, 150).

The Jaffna Mission, during this period, was carried forward by Rev. Pargiter and Rev. R. Bren, assisted by eight native schoolteachers who formed the backbone of the district's educational work (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1857). In Rev. Pargiter's absence in England, the entire responsibility for supervision fell upon Rev. Bren. His health soon failed under the strain, compelling him to retire from the field. To fill the vacancy, Rev. McArthur was appointed to Jaffna; yet he too was unable to remain. While attempting to visit his wife in South India, his vessel was caught in a violent monsoon and driven as far as Calcutta, leaving the station once again without a resident minister. In response to this prolonged vacancy, Rev. Foulkes was sent from Madras to assume charge of the mission. Despite these repeated disruptions in European leadership, the work itself continued without interruption. The native teachers, long accustomed to responsibility, sustained preaching, schooling, and pastoral oversight with remarkable steadiness, ensuring that the mission's operations did not falter during these unsettled years (Bren 1859, 164).

When Rev. Pargiter returned to Jaffna after an interval of two years, he found the mission in a satisfactory and well-sustained condition, maintained largely through the steady labour of the local agents drawn from various vocations. Their perseverance had preserved both the schools and the congregational work during his absence. Although he had been anxious about the state of the mission while away, the continuity and discipline exhibited by these native agents reassured him that the foundations laid earlier had remained firm and productive (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1860, 170).

The Old Church

When the old church was under repair, divine services were conducted in the adjoining school bungalow, which was both spacious and convenient for worship. Yet many members of the congregation hesitated to attend services there. They held a deep, almost superstitious, reverence for St. John's Church as a sacred building and believed it improper to worship God in what they regarded as an "unclean" bungalow. This hesitation reflected the cultural beliefs of a community shaped by long-standing non-Christian ritual sensibilities. For many, the sanctity of worship was inseparable from the sanctity of the physical structure, and the idea of transferring divine service to an ordinary dwelling challenged deeply rooted notions of purity, space, and religious propriety (Johnston, *Journal of Johnston* 1844).

Consecration of the New Church

With Rev. McArthur falling sick and leaving the country, the entire burden of the station once again fell upon Rev. Pargiter, who was already carrying responsibilities beyond his strength. During this unsettled period, the old church, demolished to provide space for a new roadway, left the congregation without a permanent place of worship. They waited four years for the completion of the new church, which was erected by the Government and opened on 11 December 1862 (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1862, 185).

The new building later marked its 125th anniversary on 24 June 1987, at 7 a.m., when thirty-one candidates were confirmed by the Bishop of Colombo. The new church building could accommodate three hundred worshippers, including children (*Green Book* 1987). *The Ceylon Churchman* records the date of consecration as 14 May 1862, adding yet another layer to the differing nineteenth-century consecration dates (Nesakumar 2000). A discrepancy, however, appears in the diocesan centenary volume: F. Lorenz Beven

records the date of consecration as 14 August 1862 (F. Lorenz Beven 1946, 249). However, although Lorenz Beven states that the church was consecrated in 1862, he also records that "the new church was completed in 1859 and was named after St. John the Baptist" (F. Lorenz Beven 1946, 279). This internal inconsistency within the same source further illustrates how nineteenth-century consecration records and completion dates were often reported without strict alignment.

The English Seminary at Chundikuli soon faced serious difficulties when the School Commission withdrew its grants from institutions in which Christian instruction remained compulsory. Rather than dilute its religious character to retain financial support, the seminary chose to forgo the grant for the sake of the Gospel, maintaining its identity as a missionary school even at considerable cost. This decision reflected the wider tension between government educational policy and the missionary commitment to religious instruction (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1862, 185).

Rev. Pargiter was the only missionary of the Society stationed in Jaffna in 1862, although three missionaries had formerly been employed in the district. The progress of the mission during this period was discouraging. The number of schoolchildren and church members had declined, partly because many Christians contracted marriages with non-Christians, and partly because educated Christians migrated to other parts of the island in search of employment. These movements weakened the congregations and reduced the effectiveness of the mission's educational institutions. Despite these setbacks, the catechists remained active in all three stations—Chundikuli, Nallur, and Kopay—each of which maintained an important educational institution: the English Seminary, the Girls' Boarding School, and the Preparatory School, respectively. Their work sustained the daily rhythm of teaching, visitation, and pastoral care at a time when ordained leadership was scarce. The boarding schools were confined to girls, reflecting the long-established social principle in Jaffna that property descended through the female line and that the wife exercised considerable influence within the household and wider society. For this reason, the missionaries regarded the education of girls as especially important, believing that the moral and spiritual formation of women would shape the future character of Christian families and communities (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1863, 176–177).

Pargiter reported that in 1863, Bishop Piers Claughton visited the Jaffna Peninsula and conducted a formal examination of the native candidate for ordination. During this visitation, he confirmed seventy-eight candidates

drawn from all three mission stations: Chundikuli, Nallur, and Kopay. After careful assessment, the Bishop ordained the native head catechist and schoolmaster, John Hensman, as a deacon, making him the first native minister ordained in connection with the Jaffna mission. The ordination took place in the newly built and strikingly beautiful church, where the Bishop preached a missionary sermon from John 1:41–42. The Bishop also held a special service for the native agents, catechists, schoolmasters, schoolmistresses, readers, and Bible women, acknowledging their central role in sustaining the mission during years of limited missionary staffing. At the close of his visit, Bishop Claughton expressed deep encouragement, remarking:

"I cannot leave Jaffna without expressing to you what I feel, viz., that I have seen more to encourage me in the work of Missions here than in any part of my diocese."

His words marked a significant moment of affirmation for the mission, especially after years of discouragement, epidemics, and fluctuating congregational strength (R. Pargiter, *Chundikuli Report* 1864, 183–188; *Church Missionary Intelligencer* 1869, 175).

McArthur says that every catechist, reader, schoolmaster, schoolmistress, and Bible Woman understood the duties assigned to them, and each was held personally responsible for the faithful performance of his or her work. Among these workers was a Bible Woman who was supported entirely by the native church. Her maintenance was provided partly through a weekly collection taken at the church door, and partly through the produce of coconut trees that had been dedicated by the native Christians for this specific purpose. At the mission station, every Christian householder had set apart a coconut tree, the yield of which was sold once a month for the support of the Bible Woman. This system of local giving not only sustained her ministry but also reflected the congregation's growing sense of ownership and participation in the mission's work (C. McArthur, *Chundikuli Report* 1864, 185).

According to McArthur, many of the most hopeful converts of the Jaffna Mission had dispersed across the length and breadth of the island, as well as to Madras and South India, where they found employment in a wide range of professions. They served in courts and kachcheris as clerks, proctors, and interpreters; in customs offices, banks, coffee estates, and government schools. McArthur noted with satisfaction that many of those who had thus secured positions continued to maintain a consistent Christian character.

They supported their aged parents with a sense of duty and affection, and from time to time they also contributed financially to the mission in which they had been educated. Their assistance—offered voluntarily and often sacrificially—demonstrated both gratitude and a continuing attachment to the spiritual home that had shaped their early lives (C. McArthur, *Chundikuli Report* 1864, 186).

Rev. Pargiter's health deteriorated, and he was compelled to leave for England in April 1864. Consequently, McArthur assumed responsibility for Chundikuli. According to McArthur, the mission in Jaffna was rapidly advancing, and they had baptised forty candidates during the previous year. The congregations were becoming more zealous and more regular in attendance. The mission had expanded to Kaykola, Thirunelvelly, and Kondavil, and Bible Women were actively involved in these areas. Bible classes, house visitation, moonlight meetings, and prayer meetings were held regularly (C. McArthur 1865, 169–170).

On Sunday, 13 August 1865, Bishop Piers Claughton ordained Rev. John Hensman to the priestly order and admitted three candidates—George Champion, Elijah Hoole, and Truman Parker Handy—to the diaconate at the church in Nallur (C. McArthur, *Bishop's Report* 1866, 163–165). This event marked a significant milestone in the history of the Jaffna mission. The ordination of Hensman, together with the appointment of three native catechists as deacons, signalled the beginning of a truly indigenous mission, a moment when the work of the Church began to pass gradually into the hands of native clergy. For the missionaries, this transition represented both the fulfilment of long-held hopes and a decisive step towards establishing a self-sustaining Christian community in Jaffna (*Church Missionary Intelligencer* 1869, 175).

Rev. Thomas Good recorded that McArthur had fallen ill and left the island during the cholera epidemic, leaving him as the only missionary responsible for supervising the entire district: Chundikuli, Nallur, and Kopay. Despite this heavy burden, the four recently ordained native ministers continued the work with notable steadiness and effectiveness, ensuring that the mission's activities proceeded without interruption. Good further observed that, in this moment of crisis, the native church rose to the emergency. The commitment and reliability of the indigenous clergy demonstrated the growing maturity of the mission and the increasing capacity of local Christians to sustain pastoral and educational responsibilities even in the absence of European oversight (Good, *Jaffna Report* 1867, 133; Good, *Jaffna Report* 1868).

According to Rev. Thomas Good, cholera ravaged the island again and swept away fifty native communicants (Good, *Jaffna Report* 1867, 163). The epidemic scattered schools and claimed many of the most eminent and useful Christians, while many of the most faithful Christian teachers were also cut off. The pestilence swept many more into eternity. The native Christians stood firm during this period of trial, even on their deathbeds. Native pastors, catechists, teachers, and others strove to recover from the breach.

According to Rev. Thomas Good, cholera once again ravaged the island, sweeping away fifty native communicants (Good, *Jaffna Report* 1867, 163). The epidemic scattered the schools and carried off several of the most eminent and useful Christians connected with the mission. Many of the most faithful Christian teachers were cut off, and the pestilence sent still more "into eternity," as Good described it. Despite these heavy losses, the native Christians stood firm during this severe period of trial, maintaining their faith even on their deathbeds. The native pastors, catechists, teachers, and other workers laboured earnestly to recover from the breach the epidemic had made in the mission. Their perseverance demonstrated the growing resilience and spiritual maturity of the indigenous church in Jaffna (Good, *Jaffna Report* 1868).

Native Church and Mission

The Jaffna Mission of the Church Missionary Society established both a Native Church Council and a Native Church Fund, marking a decisive step toward making the mission in Jaffna genuinely indigenous. From this point onward, the pastoral work and missionary enterprise increasingly passed into the hands of native ministers, who exercised responsibility through a representative council composed of two European missionaries, three native pastors, and four native lay delegates. With the formation of this council, the native pastors ceased to function as agents of the Missionary Society. Their role was redefined: they were now responsible solely for the pastoral ministry of the local mission stations, accountable to the Native Church Council rather than to the European missionary administration. This transition represented a significant moment in the evolution of the Jaffna mission, signalling the emergence of a self-governing, locally rooted Christian community. The Native Church Fund paid the four pastors and three catechists (Good, *Jaffna Report* 1870, 202–203).

When Bishop Claughton visited Jaffna in 1870, four Tamil clergy, four English clergy, and ten churchwardens were present at St. John's Church, Chundikuli (Balding 1922, 93).

Jaffna C.M.S. Native Missionary Association

The half-yearly meeting of the Jaffna C.M.S. Native Missionary Association was held at Chundikuli on Friday, 8 March. Attendance was large, and the College Hall was filled to the doors. The proceedings were presided over by W. C. Twynam, Esq. The meeting opened with the reading of Scripture by Rev. C. C. Handy, followed by prayer offered by Rev. G. Champion. The Report and Balance Sheet, read by the Secretaries, Mr. R. V. Vathavanam and Rev. C. T. Williams, were described as highly satisfactory. The Association continued its successful work in the districts of Pallai, Wanni, and Poonaryn, where four evangelists and three schoolmasters served under its direction. The nature of their work among the people of these districts demonstrated both the enthusiasm with which it was undertaken and the manner in which God blessed His servants wherever they went. Many souls had been brought to the Light, and many more were seeking the Truth. Messrs. D. Sinnatamby and K. Richards presented accounts of their work in Pallai and Poonaryn. This was followed by addresses from Revs. J. Carter and S. Morse, and from Messrs. R. Kunanayagam and S. Thampapilly, who emphasized that some are called to go, most are able to give, and all can pray. The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the Chairman, who had shown warm interest in the Association, and with the benediction. The gathering closed with an appeal that all unite in prayer to our Heavenly Father to send more workers into the fields of Wanni, Pallai, and Poonaryn, where "the harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few" (Gleaner, April 1895).

The twelfth Annual Report of the Association noted with deep satisfaction that the Tamil Christians of the Jaffna District, in addition to contributing towards the support of their own pastors, had given more than Rs. 600 for the direct prosecution of missionary work in the more remote regions of the Northern Province. With further sums amounting to about Rs. 870, obtained from other sources, the Association—managed largely by representatives of the various congregations—had undertaken considerable work during the year. As the extracts from its interesting Report demonstrated, it was now able to point to a settled Christian congregation gathered from among the non-Christian population through the blessing of God upon the labours of its agents in years past. The Report stated that "*it could be affirmed with deep thankfulness that, in the extension of the field, in the increase of the staff, and in*

certain spiritual results, the anticipations of hope expressed last year had been realized in good measure." The outlying districts of Poonaryn and neighbouring areas had been occupied for Gospel work since the previous January, and the Committee had appointed Mr. Richard to this task. There were now four Readers labouring earnestly in the dark and neglected districts of the Wanni, all supported by the Association. These men, though often working in unhealthy and fever-ridden localities, had, by God's mercy, been restored quickly whenever illness overtook them and had continued their work with little interruption. Mr. D. Sinnatamby wrote with gratitude of the baptism of a family—father, mother, and child—who had been enquirers the previous year. The father, formerly a temple manager, had cast aside the ola book and the silver armlet that symbolized his office and openly confessed Jesus Christ as his Saviour. Another baptism had taken place at Puthukulam in the Nadungkerny district, and the influence of this convert among his non-Christian neighbours offered hope that others might follow. The congregation at Udutturai, formed through the efforts of the Association, continued to receive careful pastoral oversight from Mr. Sinnatamby. Rev. J. Backus administered the Holy Communion to them monthly. The Christians of the village—both men and women—rendered valuable assistance to Mr. Sinnatamby in visiting non-Christian homes and neighbouring villages. Further extracts from the journals of the other three catechists followed, referring chiefly to work more recently begun and therefore less advanced. Yet these accounts clearly indicated that the seed sown had not been scattered in vain and that their labour had not been fruitless. The schools are reported on thus:

> *"The Schools at Kalvillan and Rambekullam have earned in the Government examination R120 and R99 respectively. Religious instruction is regularly given to the children At Championpattu the Sivite opposition school is not in existence now. The people face their mistake in opposing the Mission school and are asking if the Mission will re-open. There is a steady increase in the income which fills us with bright hopes for the future."*(Gleaner 1896, January)

Then, with reference to the large balance of Rs.1,257 in hand

> "*The amount of the balance is not only through our own contributions. Friends in England and elsewhere nearly contributed half the sum. But seeing that the Association is a native undertaking, we should not always expect help from outside. As our expenditure has increased owing to new appointments, the balance in hand should not tend to relax our efforts. We should be more liberal to ensure the stability of the Association as to funds. 'In the morning sow thy seed and in the*

evening withhold not thy hand' is what the Scripture teaches us to do"(Gleaner 1896, January)

Another report of November 1901 says,

> *"We have before us the Report for the past year of the Jaffna Native Missionary Association, which calls for notice in our pages. It is impossible, we think, to overrate the importance of such Associations and their efforts to spread the Gospel of Christ. Work done by the European Missionary is, no doubt, very valuable, and that which he accomplishes through the Agents who labour under his direction widen his sphere of usefulness. But all such efforts are circumscribed, and small in proportion to the vast field which has to be occupied and the numbers to be reached. It is only when the Sinhalese and Tamil Christians awake to a sense of the responsibility which rests on them individually to communicate to others the glad tidings which have come to themselves, that we can hope to see really wide diffusion of the Gospel and a general acceptance of the Saviour it reveals. Missionary Associations springing up among our people show that this spirit is developing. At several of our stations they exist and are in operation. That which we now notice seems to be particularly vigorous. Some help is acknowledged from Europeans. Grant-in-aid furnishes some of the funds. But what we particularly notice is the list of Tamil subscriptions. We count the names of over two hundred and fifty of such contributors; and although the amounts given are in some instances small, the general support given to the Association is a very pleasing feature. We wish every success to the Association, and trust that a large blessing may rest on its operations, and that, through its means, "the Word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified"*
> (Gleaner 1901, November)

In 1909, the Annual Meeting of the Native Missionary Association was held with an attendance of about one hundred men and women. The chair was taken by Mr. J. H. Hensman, B.A., the son of the first C.M.S. Tamil clergyman in Jaffna. The gathering reflected the continued interest of the local Christian community in the progress of the mission. The Association at that time employed several evangelists, who were engaged in carrying the Gospel into the surrounding districts. Their work formed an important part of the wider effort to strengthen indigenous Christian leadership and extend the reach of the mission. This meeting stood as another indication of the growing sense of responsibility among Tamil Christians and their increasing participation in native missionary initiative, as well as the ongoing

development of local evangelistic work within the Jaffna Peninsula (Gleaner, July 1909).

Although their salaries were small, fourteen Bible Women worked tirelessly throughout the district, reaching the surrounding areas and strengthening the ministry. Through their steady visitation, teaching, and witness, they assisted the Church in its efforts to extend the Gospel and helped lay the foundations for new churches. Their labour formed an essential part of the wider mission, demonstrating how local Christian women contributed significantly to evangelistic outreach and village church planting during this period (Gleaner, March 1910).

During the episcopate of Bishop Ernest A. Copleston, there was no District Missionary of European origin stationed in Jaffna, a striking indication of how fully the leadership of the Church had passed into local hands. The entire responsibility for pastoral care, preaching, administration, and the oversight of schools and village congregations rested upon the four native pastors of Jaffna, who carried forward the work with dedication and quiet strength. Their ministry demonstrated the maturity of the indigenous Church and its ability to sustain and extend the mission without the constant presence of European clergy. This transition marked an important moment in the development of indigenous Christian leadership and testified to the depth of faith and commitment found among the Tamil clergy of the peninsula (Balding 1922, 199).

A Veteran Tamil Pastor - Rev. George Champion

Rev. George Champion, a veteran Tamil pastor, marked his fiftieth year of service in 1895, reflecting with gratitude on God's guidance from his early years as a teacher and catechist to his long ministry as an ordained clergyman. In his annual report from Chundikuli, Jaffna, he notes the strengthening of the churches following the Bishop's visitation, the filling of long-vacant pastorates, and an ordination service at Christ Church, Jaffna, conducted entirely in Tamil. He reports two confirmation services at Nallur, a well-attended New Year's midnight service, and a special thanksgiving gathering on 15 April to commemorate his fifty years of work. Despite poor paddy harvests, congregational giving remained steady, and district-level meetings—including the Native Missionary Association—were lively and encouraging. Over ten years, his parish grew from 314 to 402 Christians, with communicants nearly doubling to 194; baptisms for the year numbered nineteen. The Y.M.C.A. expanded with enthusiastic participation from St. John's College students, many of whom volunteered as Sunday school

teachers. Three Sunday schools at the station and one at Mandaithivu continued under plans for a new lay-led system. The report closes with a remark on Tamil clergy adopting English dress, a reflection of Ceylon's increasing Europeanisation, though the writer regrets the decline of graceful local attire (Gleaner 1895, 124).

Mandaithivu > Chundikuli

Mandaithivu remained under the pastoral care of St. John's Church, Chundikuli, during the long ministry of the veteran Rev. G. Champion, who served the Master for fifty-one years in connection with the C.M.S. During his tenure, he recorded the following account of one section of his pastoral district, describing both his visits and the spiritual condition of the people.

Rev. Champion wrote that he had made three visits to Mandaithivu during the year and that on one of these occasions he had remained for twelve days. The Sunday spent there left a deep impression on him, for all the Christians of the village joined in the service, together with members of his own household. Among those present was a young man who had contracted what Champion described as a non-Christian marriage. After the service, the young man approached him in tears, expressing bitter sorrow for his misconduct and promising that he would try to lead his wife to the Lord. Champion believed in the sincerity of his repentance and prayed that God would strengthen him in this resolve.

During the same service, Champion observed a woman who was the wife of one of their former converts. At the time of her husband's baptism, she had fled to her father's house and had even persuaded her father to oppose the baptism. Champion now found that she had returned to live with her husband and, influenced by his conduct, had become inclined towards the Christian faith. She was, at the time of his writing, preparing for baptism. Another woman was also present—one who had shown strong hostility to Christianity when her husband was baptized. She too had begun attending the services. Champion believed that this change of heart was largely due to the influence of her two children, who had been educated at the Nallur Boarding Training Institution and whose example had softened her attitude towards the Christian faith. Through these accounts, Rev. Champion's report revealed the gradual but steady spiritual transformation taking place in Mandaithivu, shaped by pastoral visitation, family influence, and the quiet persistence of Christian witness (Gleaner, January 1896).

Rev. Jacob Thompson reported the following concerning the church in Mandaithivu, which was under the pastoral care of St. John's Church, Chundikuli.

"About two miles south of Jaffna there is an island called Mandaithivu. Here Mr. Richards, a Tamil catechist, had been working for some years and had gathered together a little church of over fifty members. Mr. Richards' wife and family were living in his own house in the village of Kopay. He had been content to live on the island in a poor thatched shed by himself, in apostolic simplicity. He was anxious to collect £100 to build a church, and had succeeded in obtaining sufficient funds to lay the foundation and raise the walls a few feet. It would be but a modest building, yet sufficient to shelter the worshippers and testify to all that the Church was alive and growing.

Rev. Thomson wrote that he was anxious to help this veteran catechist in the work of building not only this church but also a decent cottage for himself and his wife. The self-denial of their fellow churchmen in lonely places, he said, was a splendid inspiration. It banished depression and pessimism. By the way, Rev. S. Somasundaram visited the island last Sunday and found twenty-five persons present at the celebration. He had with him my little set of vessels, which I use for private communions. I wonder whether, in the safe of some fashionable church, there may be a second set which they could give to this church on the island of Mandaithivu" (Gleaner, March 1911).

Rev. Samuel Somasundaram

In the Chundikuli Pastorate, which also included the growing work on the island of Mandaithivu, the incumbent was Rev. S. S. Somasundaram, whose ministry provided steady pastoral oversight across the district. The Christian community under his care numbered 541, of whom 246 were communicants, reflecting a congregation with a strong core of committed members. The pastorate also maintained nine vernacular schools, which continued to play a vital role in nurturing Christian instruction, strengthening literacy, and extending the Church's influence among the surrounding villages (Balding 1922, 101).

St. Peter's Day became a true red-letter day in the history of the C.M.S. Mission in Jaffna, for it marked the ordination of Samuel Somasundaram. Somasundaram was the son of the owner of one of the most prominent Saivite temples in the north of Ceylon. As a boy, he had studied at the American Mission College in Jaffna, where he secretly became a disciple of

Jesus Christ. While still in Jaffna, he passed both the Entrance and First in Arts examinations of the University of Calcutta. He later left for Calcutta, where he was baptised by Rev. G. Parsons of the C.M.S. Afterward, he completed his degree with Mathematical Honours and, following a short interval, returned to Jaffna. He was appointed Mathematical Master at St. John's College, but he remained unsatisfied, longing to devote himself entirely to evangelistic work and to receive deeper instruction in the Christian faith.

It was therefore arranged that he should proceed to the Cambridge Nicholson Institution in Travancore, where the course of study closely resembled that of English theological schools, while also including instruction in Hindu religion. In October of the previous year, Somasundaram passed the Cambridge and Oxford preliminary examination for Holy Orders in the Second Class. The question papers, sent directly from England, were identical to those taken by candidates for ordination there. In April, the Bishop graciously consented to hold the ordination in Jaffna, choosing the largest and most central of the C.M.S. churches and conducting the entire service in the vernacular. He invited all the C.M.S. pastors to participate. Mr. Thompson acted on behalf of the Archdeacon; Mr. Hanan read the Litany; and Mr. Matthias and Mr. Morse assisted at the Holy Communion. The venerable Mr. Backus, serving as the Bishop's chaplain, carried the pastoral staff with evident consciousness of his office. Mr. Daniel, long past his threescore years and ten, preached a striking and earnest sermon. It proved deeply moving to hear the aged minister's heartfelt appeal to the congregation for prayer and his solemn exhortation to the young man upon whom, as he said, his mantle was to fall. The occasion stood as a memorable milestone in the unfolding story of the Jaffna C.M.S. Mission and in the emergence of native clergy within the Church (Gleaner, July 1909).

The Proposed Work among the Oppressed and the Neglected Caste

Rev. Jacob Thompson (Thompson 1916, March, 20-22)

During the past century, the three Protestant missions in Jaffna (American, Anglican, and Wesleyan) had been chiefly engaged in educational and evangelistic work among privileged-caste Hindus. As a result, the great majority of Christians were of privileged-caste origin, with only a very small minority from oppressed castes. This policy had protected the Church from the stigma of being viewed as an oppressed-caste organisation, but it had also hindered the planting of the Church in the most fertile parts of the

field. It had secured for the missions a strong body of supporters in Jaffna, yet limited the wider reach of the Gospel.

Christian teaching and Christian ideas had, over time, permeated the Hindu community, largely because the Church in Jaffna had produced Christian leaders of influence. This long engagement made Hindus less opposed to their children becoming Christians, especially when suitable marriages could be arranged with Christian relatives. It also made Christians less shocked when their relatives reverted to Hinduism. On the whole, the fact that the Christian Church in Jaffna had been predominantly privileged-caste for the past century gave grounds for the hope that Jaffna as a whole might yet be won for Christ.

The spiritual benefit to the privileged-caste community had been accompanied by a distinct social benefit. Because of the work of the Christian missions, the Hindu community had become more prosperous than it might otherwise have been and better able to improve the buildings of their temples. The missions had improved the social condition of the people generally, and especially of the Christian community. This was noted not as criticism but to show that helping another section of the community would not be an entirely new departure; every nation that became Christian had benefited socially.

All three missions had been conducted along similar lines. Each had a college for privileged-caste boys and a high school for privileged-caste girls, along with a network of vernacular schools. Most of the children attending these schools were privileged-caste Hindus, and most of the teachers were converts who had become Christians during their training, generally from poor but privileged-caste families. They themselves gained little from mission employment, but their children benefited from the attention given to their training. If it were later suggested that some people might be received into the Church for the sake of properly training their children, those who might otherwise be kept "at the porch," it should be remembered that such action was not new and had worked well in the past.

Looking back, there was much to be thankful for in the work done among the privileged-caste people. It had been right that the first efforts of the Christian Church were directed there; it would have been far more difficult had such work begun only after a mission to the oppressed caste. The Church now had men and women of influence and ability who could become its permanent leaders.

Yet, looking around and ahead, it was clear that they could not remain satisfied with concentrating almost all their energies on the privileged-caste community—especially in areas where their efforts for social advancement were no longer appreciated. There had been a time when the vernacular schoolwork of the missions was welcomed with gratitude by the Hindu community; now opposition schools were frequently started by privileged-caste Hindus. Where such opposition arose in neighbourhoods with oppressed-caste populations, it would be wise to direct efforts towards those who would appreciate them.

In this connection, they asked why they should not welcome the Rural School Ordinance and thereby secure the help of the State in extending education to those who needed it most. The Government had begun compelling oppressed-caste children to attend school. The writer advocated work among the oppressed-caste community because he believed the field would prove far more fertile than work among the privileged caste. This had been the experience of Christians throughout India. In the Telugu country, many Brahmins had been converted in the early days, but in later years the harvest had been gathered chiefly among the oppressed caste. In Travancore, young missionaries had once been instructed to direct their energies to caste people, but the work among the outcastes proved so attractive and fruitful that none followed those instructions. As a result, in North Travancore, where there were fewer missionaries than in Jaffna, over 12,900 adults had been baptised during the past twenty years. The outcaste people recognised that the missionaries were their friends and that their social condition was being raised through missionary influence. The native clergy there, though almost entirely of privileged-caste origin, worked with equal zeal for the uplift of these oppressed communities.

In Jaffna, however, all existing institutions had tended to emphasise the social divide between privileged and oppressed castes by excluding those of oppressed-caste origin, while no institution existed for their exclusive benefit. At Uduvil, Tellippalai, and Chundikuli, a few oppressed-caste pupils had been admitted with difficulty, but such exceptional cases did not meet the need. Something on a much larger scale was required. The writer did not believe the time had come for oppressed-caste boys to be freely admitted to boarding houses, but he saw no reason why hostels could not be established near the Colleges, allowing such boys to board there and attend as day scholars. As for the girls, he suggested that one of the four boarding schools should be arranged—if not exclusively for them—at least for their special benefit.

In all these efforts, he urged a clear distinction between oppressed-caste Hindus and Christians of oppressed-caste origin. For the past twelve years, two or three such Christian boys had been admitted annually to St. John's College, and opposition from privileged-caste friends had been eased when it was explained that these boys, by baptism, had become his own spiritual brothers. When an oppressed-caste boy became a Mohammedan and donned the fez, he entered a great brotherhood that would defend him; the writer feared that such a sense of comradeship was less marked among Christians.

Regarding the admission of day boys to Elementary English Schools, he believed the effort would be greatly strengthened by cooperation among the three Missions. St. John's had not suffered, nor had St. Patrick's, but greater cooperation would reduce potential difficulties. He also suggested the desirability of developing industries among the oppressed-caste community. Pariah cloth, he noted, was a commodity that sold well and was appreciated, yet was difficult to obtain and rather expensive. He wondered whether it might be possible to encourage this industry among the Pariahs themselves, under Christian instruction.

The writer acknowledged that difficulties were inevitable, but believed that by persevering they could ensure that the children of these communities would one day become a source of strength to the Church. To sum up, his suggestions were as follows: first, that wherever possible, difficulties in conducting privileged-Class Vernacular Schools should be used as opportunities to convert them into schools for children of oppressed-caste origin; second, that one of the Girls' Boarding Schools should be adapted especially for girls of oppressed-caste origin; third, that hostels should be established near the English Schools, and that all three Missions should unite in admitting two or three Christian boys of oppressed-caste origin each year; and fourth, that industries should be developed among communities that placed themselves under Christian instruction.

If such a policy were carried out, he believed that by the end of the second century of the mission they would not, as at present, have less than two per cent of the oppressed-caste population in the Protestant Churches of Jaffna. He argued that these people must be shown that the Church was their friend, genuinely interested in their social advancement, and that when they became Christians they entered a great brotherhood. If the first converts received training in a well-conducted boarding school, they would in time become a source of strength and power to the Church (Thompson 1916, March, 20–22).

The proposed work among the oppressed and neglected castes emerged from a growing conviction that the mission in Jaffna could no longer confine its energies to the privileged-caste community alone. For more than a century, the Church had directed its principal efforts towards those of higher social standing, and while this strategy had produced educated leaders and strengthened Christian influence, it had left the vast lower-caste population largely untouched. The writer argued that the time had come for a deliberate and compassionate shift, one that recognised the dignity of these communities, acknowledged their long history of exclusion, and sought to extend to them the same spiritual, educational, and social opportunities that had transformed the lives of others. He believed that such work would not only uplift the most marginalised but would also deepen the Church's witness, broaden its fellowship, and fulfil its calling to serve those who had been overlooked for generations.

The Jaffna Christian Convention

The second Jaffna Christian Convention was held in August in St. John's College Hall under the auspices of the Jaffna Christian Union, founded in 1907 to unite missions and churches in evangelistic work and to promote the interests of the Kingdom. In June, the Committee adopted the idea of a week of simultaneous evangelism, following the example of the South Indian United Church, and planned the Convention as a spiritual preparation for that effort. The Convention met for four days, from Friday the 22nd to Monday the 25th. The missionaries were Rev. W. E. Rowlands, Rev. A. E. Restarick, and Rev. T. Subrahmanyam.

Each day opened with a devotional meeting, followed by a morning session led by Rev. Rowlands, who spoke on the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, and peace—and on the final day expounded Ezekiel 47 and the life-giving river. His earnestness and long experience gave weight to his messages. The afternoon consisted of sectional conferences: Miss Howland organised the women's meetings; Rev. Restarick presided over the meetings for pastors and Bible class leaders; and Rev. Selby led the young men's sessions. Attendance was strong, with seats filled even in the hottest hours.

The evening sessions began at six, led by Rev. T. Subrahmanyan and Rev. A. E. Restarick. The hall was filled each night, and on the final evenings extra seating was required outside. There was a strong expectation of a vision of God throughout the Convention. The keynote of the four meetings was Christ—on earth, on the Cross, on the throne, and in the heart. The final theme was illustrated through Rev. Subrahmanyan's own conversion from

Brahmanism, after much suffering, until he crowned Christ King in his heart. Rev. Restarick urged the people to surrender unconditionally to Christ, and about one thousand signed the pledge of self-surrender. Thank offerings amounted to Rs. 125. The Convention closed with a deep sense of God's presence, as He blessed His people with renewed vision and dedication to life and service. Unto Him be glory in the Church in Christ Jesus unto all ages. Amen (Gleaner 1916, April).

Conclusion

The history of Chundikuli stretches across more than two centuries, forming a continuous thread in the Christian story of Jaffna. From its earliest missionary beginnings to its later development under native leadership, Chundikuli emerged as a place where faith, education, and community life were patiently cultivated. The institutions rooted here—its church, schools, and mission stations—became enduring centres of learning and spiritual formation, shaping countless lives across generations.

Throughout this long span, the work advanced not through dramatic breakthroughs but through steady, faithful labour. Bishops, missionaries, pastors, teachers, Bible women, and lay workers, many of them now forgotten, persevered through epidemics, social resistance, political change, and economic hardship. Their efforts reveal a community that learned to endure, adapt, and grow while remaining anchored in its spiritual calling. The narrative shows how the Gospel took root slowly in what many once described as "hard soil," yet ultimately bore fruit through persistence, prayer, and the quiet influence of Christian witness.

As the story of Chundikuli makes clear, its legacy is not confined to the past. The foundations laid over two centuries continue to support the life of the Church and its institutions today. The story stands as a reminder that the strength of the mission lay not only in its structures but in its people—those who went, those who gave, and those who prayed. Their combined witness forms a heritage upon which future generations may continue to build, trusting in the God who sustains every good work.

Missionaries and Priests	**Year**
Rev. Christian David	1801-1841
CMS Missionaries holding the License of Bishop of Colombo	
Rev. J. Talbot Johnston	1842-1849
Rev. Robert Pargiter	1850-1857
Catechists and Assistants	1857-1859
Rev. Robert Pargiter	1859-1864
Rev. Charles Chapman McArthur	1864-1865
Native Missionary Association	
Native Pastors of CMS holding Bishop's License	
Rev. Elijah Hoole / Rev. Thomas Good	1866-1868
Rev. Elijah Hoole	1869-1881
Rev. George Champion	1882-1901
Rev. G. Daniel	1902-1911
Rev. Sangarapillai Samuel Somasundaram	1912-1916
Bishop's Appointments	
Rev. S. C. Daniel	1912-1926
Rev. Isaac Tambyah	1922-1932
Rev. I. S.Ratnathickam	1932-1936
Rev. Issac Tambyah	1936
Rev. V. B. Muthuveloe	1936-1956
Rev. W. R. Coomarasamy	1956-1963
Rev. J. T. Arulanantham	1963-1964
Rev. W. R. Coomarasamy	1964-1968
Canon V.S.D. Sathianadhan	1969-1970
Rev. L. B. Arulpragasam	1970
Rev. A. J. C. Selvaratnam	1971-1976
Ven. J. J. Gnanapragasam	1976-1978
Ven. J. Sarvananthan	1978-1989
Rev. Bennet Balasingh	1990
Ven. Selliah Philip Nesakumar	1991-2003
Rev. N. Jameson Gnanaponrajah	2004-2006
Ven. Selliah Philip Nesakumar	2007-2011
Ven. Samuel Jeyanthkumar Jeyaveerasingan	2012-2016
Ven. Samuel Jeyakumar Ponniah	2017-2021
Rev. Selvanayagam Stephen Jebachelvan	2022-

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Rev. Christian David's Narrative of the Church's Beginnings

The following extract is taken from the autobiography of Rev. Christian David (1876), in which he recounts the events leading to his receiving the keys of St. John's Church, Chundikuli, and conducting the first Anglican service there on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1801.

In 1801, December the 20th, about 6 o'clock p.m., I went in company with my cousin Josephpulle to the church and tenderly opened the door of the vestry where the animals were secure within. The sheep began to bleat. We immediately knelt down, and, I supplicated the Lord that He would graciously incline the heart of the above named gentleman to give the sacred house into my charge for the purpose of preaching His holy word. In the hurry of the moment after prayer, we left the place, forgetting to shut the door. On the 21st evening, according to my resolution at the same hour, I went thither with my said cousin, and finding the door strongly bolted, immediately I thought that the shepherd had secured the door, in consequence of which, we entered into the church through the window on the north side, and kneeling down as I was, engaged in prayer, a great sudden light blazed before my sight, near the pulpit on the east side. I immediately concluded my prayer, and on returning home I mentioned to my cousin about the light I saw in the church while I was praying. He said that he did not see it, but encouraged me by observing that it was a good sign, and that we should continue to wrestle with God until we got possession of the holy building.

On the 22nd as we approached the middle door on the south side of the church, Colonel Barbet came from his residence (which after his death was purchased by Government and is now used as the Kutchery) and requested me to tell the shepherd who was coming behind him, that he must bring the sheep the next morning to the Fort, that he will give him a place to keep them, and also desired me to call on him at the Kutchery in the Fort, as he intended to give over the said Church to my charge, and likewise promised to assist me with prisoners to clean the same. Immediately I offered up my prayer and thanksgiving to God had praised Him like David of old. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies." Ps ciii. 1-4.

On the morning of the 23rd, I went to the Kutchery in the Fort, when Colonel Barbet delivered the keys, and at the same time ordered his peons to get the church well cleaned by the prisoners, and particularly he sent a general notice to every district of Jaffna and Manaar that I was appointed as a licensed preacher of the Gospel by Government and I was to officiate in St. John's Church and whosoever wished to be married and to have their children baptized might apply to me.

On the evening of the 24th, being Christmas eve, I preached for the first time in St. John's Church, and the text I selected for that joyful occasion was Phillipians iv. 4. “Rejoice in the Lord alway, and I say rejoice.” People of every description attended the service, among whom I was gratified to find two Hindu scholars of the Venerable Fathers Schwarts and Jaerricke. So I continued by the help of God to preach regularly, during my residence here, in St. John's Church till I retired on pension in September, 1841. Since then the Church has been given over to the Church Missionary Society, yet, by the Grace of God, when my health permits me, I do perform occasionally my ministerial duties in the said Church, at the request of the missionary who is stationed there.

- Rev. Christian David

From the *Autobiography of the Late Rev. Christian David (1876)*. Accessed online at https://noolaham.net/project/787/78649/78649.pdf on 21 July 2026.

Church Missionary Society (CMS)

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) was founded on 12 April 1799 in Aldersgate Street, London, emerging from the Eclectic Society and supported by members of the Clapham Sect, notably William Wilberforce, John Venn, and John Newton. Rooted in the spiritual fervor of the Great Awakening, CMS sought to mobilize laymen and women for missionary service at a time when the Church of England hesitated to engage the expanding modern world.

The Society's first missionaries, trained at the Berlin Seminary, were German Lutherans from Württemberg. Their work began in Sierra Leone in 1804, soon extending to India, Canada, New Zealand, and regions around the Mediterranean. Over time, CMS established missions in Africa (Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Congo, Rwanda, Sudan), Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, China, Japan), and the Middle East (Palestine, Jordan, Iran, Egypt).

Initially known as the Society for Missions to Africa and the East, CMS was renamed in 1812. Its founders included Charles Simeon, Henry Thornton, Thomas Babington, and Basil Woodd. Thomas Scott, the biblical commentator, served as its first secretary. The Society's early proposals were influenced by Charles Grant, George Udny, and David Brown of the East India Company, who enlisted Wilberforce's support in 1787. CMS's headquarters moved from Salisbury Square, where it remained for over 150 years, to Waterloo Road in 1966, and finally to Oxford in 2007. From its inception, thousands of missionaries crossed cultural and geographic boundaries, making the Gospel at home in diverse contexts—often in ways unforeseen by its founders. In 1829, CMS began sending medical missionaries, led by Dr. Henry Graham, whose work in Sierra Leone marked a shift from caring for mission staff to serving local communities. This integration of spiritual and physical care became a hallmark of CMS's holistic mission approach.

The CMS missionaries had concentrated their efforts on Africa until 1817 and showed little interest in Ceylon because the British East India Company had created a hostile environment for missionary activity. A persistent shortage of missionaries further restricted the Society's ability to expand its work until 1817, when it finally commissioned its first group for the island.

On 15 December 1817, Bishop Ryder of Gloucester ordained four men—Samuel Lambrick, Benjamin Ward, Robert Mayor, and Joseph Knight—to be sent to Ceylon as missionaries. Accompanied by Mrs. Ward and Mrs. Mayor, they sailed from London on the *Vittoria* and arrived at Galle on 29 June 1818. Once in the island, the four missionaries were assigned to four different regions: Jaffna (North), Kotte (West), Kandy (Central), and Baddegama (South), marking the formal beginning of the CMS presence across the island's major districts (Pathmanathan 2022, 224).

மனதைக் கவர்ந்த பரி.யோவான் தேவாலயம்: சில முக்கியமான குறிப்புக்கள்

அதி வண கலாநிதி S.ஜெபநேசன்,
B.A., M.A. (Tamil), M.A. (English),
Dip in Edu., B.D., Ph.D.
முன்னாள் பேராயர்,
தென்னிந்தியத் திருச்சபை யாழ் ஆதீனம் /
முன்னாள் அதிபர், யாழ்ப்பாணக் கல்லூரி

போர்த்துக்கீசர் தமது சமயமாகிய உரோமன் கத்தோலிக்க சமயத்தை தீவிரமாகப் பரப்பினார்கள். யாழ்ப்பாணத்தில் பெரும்பாலான துறவிகள் பிரான்ஸிஸ்கன் கட்டளைக் குருமாராகவே இருந்தார்கள். அவர்களோடு இயேசு சபை கட்டளைக் குருமார்களும் பணியாற்றினார்கள் எனத் தெரிகின்றது. இவர்கள் யாழ்ப்பாணக் குடாநாட்டின் மூலை முடுக்குகள் எல்லாம் தேவாலயங்களைக் கட்டி கத்தோலிக்க சமயத்தைப் பரப்பினார்கள். பிரான்ஸிஸ்கன் குருமார்களே முதலில் சுண்டுக்குளியில் தேவாலயத்தைக் கட்டினார்கள்.

1658ம் ஆண்டு போர்த்துக்கீசருடைய ஆட்சி முடிவுக்கு வந்தது. ஒல்லாந்தர் இலங்கையின் கரையோரப் பகுதிகளின் அதிபதிகளாயினர். அவர்கள் கத்தோலிக்க தேவாலயங்களை டச்சு-சீர்திருந்திய தேவாலயங்களாக (Dutch Reformed Church) மாற்றினார்கள். யாழ்ப்பாணத்தில் பல தேவாலயங்களின் வரலாறு இவ்வாறாகத்தான் அமைந்தது. ஒல்லாந்தர் மக்கள் அனைவரும் தமது சமயமாகிய டச்சு-சீர்திருந்திய சபையில் சேர்ந்து விட வேண்டும் என்று நிர்ப்பந்தித்தனர். சுண்டுக்குளியில் போர்த்துக்கீசர் கட்டிய தேவாலயமும் டச்சு-சீர்திருந்திய சபையின் தேவாலயமாக மாற்றப்பட்டது.

1796ம் ஆண்டு ஆங்கிலேயர் இலங்கைத் தீவின் கரையோரப் பகுதிகளினைக் கைப்பற்றினார்கள். ஆங்கிலேய அரசு மக்களுக்கு பூரண மத சுதந்திரம் வழங்கியது. மக்கள் தாம் விரும்பிய சமயத்தை அனுஷ்டிக்கலாம் என்றும் சமயத்தின் அடிப்படையில் எந்த விதமான பாகுபாடும் இருக்க மாட்டாது என்றும் அறிவித்தது. இந்த அறிவிப்பைத் தொடர்ந்து பலரும் தமது முன்னோர்களின் சமயத்தைக் கடைப்பிடித்தனர். ஒல்லாந்தர் உருவாக்கிய டச்சு-சீர்திருந்திய சபையும் சூரியனைக் கண்ட பனிபோல மறைந்து போயிற்று. அவர்கள் உருவாக்கிய தேவாலயங்கள் கவனிப்பாரற்று கைவிடப்பட்டன. சுண்டுக்குளி தேவாலயமும் முற்றாக கைவிடப்பட்டது. 1796ம் ஆண்டு முதல் வேறு அநேக தேவாலயங்களைப் போலவே சுண்டுக்குளித் தேவாலயமும் சபை கூடிவருதலோ, ஆராதனையோ இல்லாது பாழாய் விடப்பட்டது. அக்காலத்து யாழ்ப்பாணக் கோட்டை தளகர்த்தனும் வடமாகாண Commissioner உம் ஆக இருந்த கர்னல் பார்பெற் (Colonel Barbet) என்பவரின் ஆட்டுக் கொட்டிலாக்கப்பட்டது.

1801ம் ஆண்டு மாசிமாதம் யாழ்ப்பாணக் கிறிஸ்தவ மார்க்கநிலை இவ்விதமிருப்பதை மகான் கிறிஸ்தியன் தாவீது அதிக துக்கத்தோடும், மிகுந்த வெட்கத்தோடும் கண்டார். அப்படியிருந்தும் அவர் மனம் பின்வாங்காதவராய் செபமே செயம் என நம்பி, சர்வ வல்லமையுள்ள தேவன் சகல தடைகளையும் அகற்ற வல்லவர் என்ற விசுவாசத்துடன், அவரும் அவருடைய இனத்தவருள் ஒருவரும் ஒவ்வொருநாளும் சாயந்திரம் ஆறு மணிக்கு ஆட்டுப்பட்டியாயிருந்த ஆலயத்துக்குள் நுழைந்து, அவ்வாலயத்தை "மானிட ஆட்டுத்தொழுவம்" ஆக்கித்தர வேண்டும் என்று விண்ணப்பம் பண்ணினர் (அமெரிக்கன் மிஷன் சரித்திரம் - வேலுப்பிள்ளை).

ஆங்கிலேய அரசாங்கம் போர்த்துக்கீசரைப் போலவோ ஒல்லாந்தரைப் போலவோ நேரடியாக தமது மதத்தைப் பரப்பவில்லை. ஆனால் புரட்டஸ்தாந்து மிஷன்களுக்கு

தமது முழு ஆதரவையும் வழங்கினார்கள். இதனால் ஒல்லாந்தர் பயன்படுத்திய தேவாலயங்களை புரட்டஸ்தாந்து மிஷன்களும் வழிபாட்டுக்கு உபயோகிக்க அனுமதியளித்தார்கள். கிறிஸ்தியன் டேவிட்டின் ஜெபத்திற்கு இறைவன் பதிலளித்தார். 1801 டிசம்பர் 24 ஆம் நாள், கிறிஸ்துமஸ் முன்னிரவில், அவர் தூய யோவான் ஸ்நானகர் ஆலயத்தில் முதலாவது ஆங்கிலிக்கன் ஆராதனையை நடத்தினார்.

1842 சுண்டுக்குளித் தேவாலயம் Church Missionary Society (CMS) என்ற அங்கிலிக்கன் திருச்சபைக்கு சொந்தமானது. CMS தொண்டர்கள் அங்கிருந்த பழைய தேவாலயத்தை இடித்து புதிய ஒரு தேவாலயத்தைக் கட்டினார்கள். தேவாலயத்தின் பெயர் Church of St. John the Baptist எனப்பட்டது.

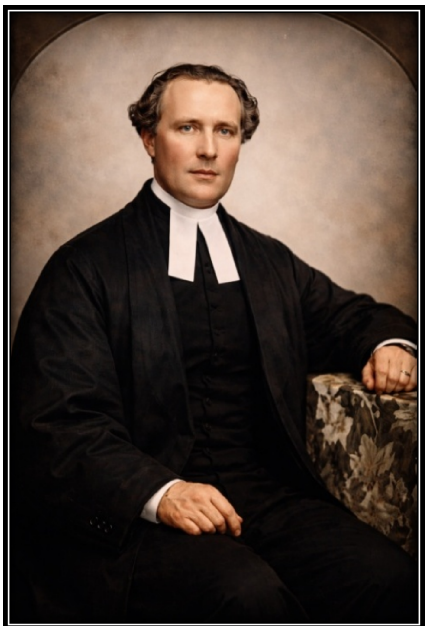
பரி.யோவான் தேவாலயத்தை நினைத்துப் பார்க்கின்றபொழுது அங்கு வழிபட்ட மாமனிதர்களைப் பற்றிய நினைவு வருகின்றது. ஹென்ஸ்மன் குடும்பத்தினர் இச்சபையில் வழிபட்டவர்களில் முக்கியமானவர்கள். அவர்களிடையே ஜேம்ஸ் ஹென்ஸ்மன் மிகவும் முக்கியமானவர். ஹென்ஸ்மன் குடும்பத்தாரின் பூர்வீகம் வேலணையாகும். வேலணையில் வாழ்ந்த நாகநாதன் என்பவரே அங்கு முதன்முதலாக அங்கிலிக்கன் கிறிஸ்தவரானார். அவர் தம்முடைய பெயரை ஹென்ஸ்மன் என மாற்றிக் கொண்டார். இவரின் மக்களில் ஒருவரான ஜேம்ஸ் ஹென்ஸ்மன் கும்பகோணம் சென்று அங்கிருந்த அரசினர் கல்லூரியில் ஆங்கில போதனாசிரியராகவும் பின்னர் அதன் அதிபராகவும் விளங்கினார். அங்கு கற்றவர்களில் ஒருவர் மகாகனம் ஸ்ரீனிவாச சாஸ்திரி. மகாகனம் ஸ்ரீனிவாச சாஸ்திரி வின்ஸ்டன் சேர்ச்சிலுடைய ஆங்கிலப்பேச்சில் இலக்கணப் பிழை உண்டு எனக் கூறி அதனைத் திருத்தியவர். ஒரு முறை யாழ்ப்பாணக் கல்லூரியின் உப அதிபராக இருந்த ஜோன் வீரவாகு செல்லையா, பெங்களூருக்குச் சென்றபொழுது மகாகனம் ஸ்ரீனிவாச சாஸ்திரியை சந்தித்தார். அப்பொழுது அவர் தான் யாழ்ப்பாணத்திற்கு வரவிரும்புகின்றேன் என்று கூறினார். ஏன் அப்படி விரும்புகிறீர் என திரு. செல்லையா கேட்ட பொழுது "உலகத்திலேயே தூய தமிழ் பேசப்படுகின்ற இடம் யாழ்ப்பாணம் என்று கேள்விப்பட்டேன். அந்த இடத்தைப் பார்க்க வேண்டும் அது மட்டுமன்றி எனது குரு ஜேம்ஸ் ஹென்ஸ்மனையும் சந்தித்து எனது வணக்கத்தை தெரிவிக்க வேண்டும்" என்றும் கூறினார். கூறியபடியே அவர் யாழ்ப்பாணத்திற்கு வந்து ஜேம்ஸ் ஹென்ஸ்மனை சந்தித்தார். அவர் பரியோவான் கல்லூரிக்கும் சென்றிருந்தார். ஹென்ஸ்மன் குடும்பம் இவ்வாறு யாழ்ப்பாணத்திற்கு பெருமை சேர்த்தது. வேறு பல அறிஞர்களையும், மகான்களையும் உருவாக்கியது சுண்டுக்குளித் தேவாலயம். வேறு பல மகான்கள் இத் தேவாலயத்தில் வழிபட்டார்கள்.

தென்னிந்திய திருச்சபையின் முதலாவது பேராயர் சபாபதி குலேந்திரன், பேராயர் D.J.அம்பலவாணர் ஆகியோர் ஒரு காலகட்டத்தில் இங்கு வழிபட்டார்கள். அவர்கள் இருவருமே பரி.யோவான் கல்லூரியின் பழைய மாணவர்கள். அரசாங்க அதிபர் திரு. J.M. சபாரத்தினம், பிரபல இருதய நோய் நிபுணர் Dr. A.V.A. வேதநாயகம், வழக்கறிஞர் ஜிம்மி ராஜரட்ணம் - இவர்கள் அப்பொழுது தேவாலயத்திற்கு கிரமமாக வருவார்கள்.

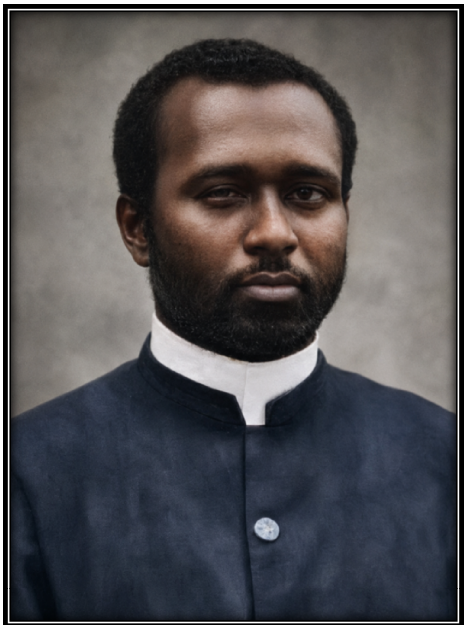
பரி.யோவான் தேவாலயம் எனக்கு இனிய நினைவுகளைத் தருகின்றது. எனது திருமணம் பரி.யோவான் தேவாலயத்தில்தான் நடைபெற்றது. அப்பொழுது இத் தேவாலயத்தின் மதகுருவாக இருந்தவர் கனன் V.S.D. சத்தியநாதன். எனது திருமணத்திற்குப் பின்னர் நான் இந்த தேவாலயத்திலேதான் வழிபாடு செய்தேன். எனது மனைவி பெந்தக்கோஸ்தே தேவாலயத்திலேதான் வழிபாடு செய்தார்.

இன்று திருச்சபையைச் சேர்ந்த பலர் வெளிநாடுகளுக்கு சென்று விட்டனர். திருச்சபை தொடர்ந்து வளர்ச்சியடைகின்றது. இத் திருச்சபையை வளர்த்த வளர்த்து வருகின்ற குருமார்களை நினைத்து இறைவனைப் போற்றுகின்றேன்.

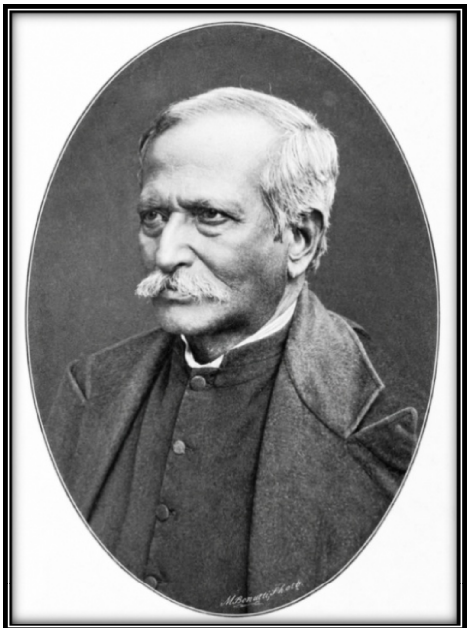
Former Vicars of St. John the Baptist's Church, Chundikuli



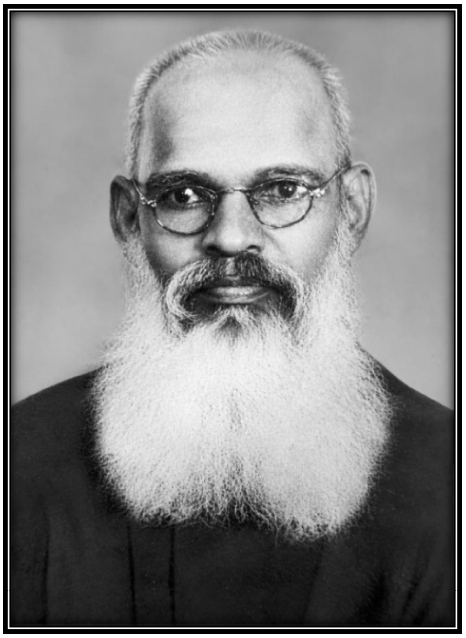
Rev. Robert Pargiter
1850-1857/1859-1864



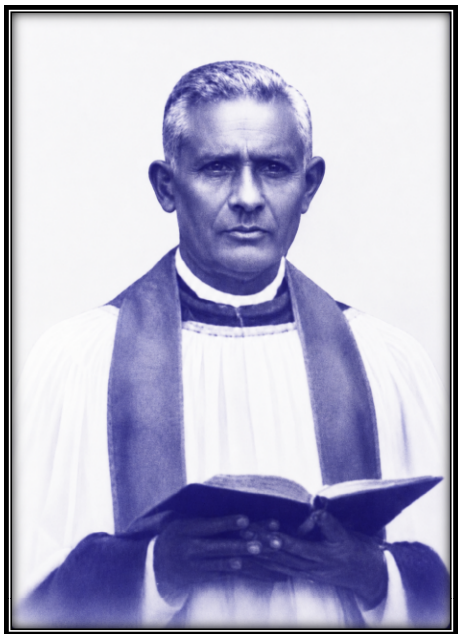
Rev. Elijah Hoole
1866-1868 / 1869-1881



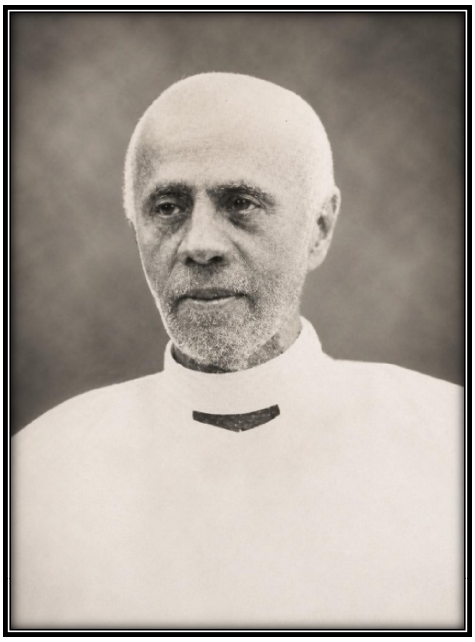
Rev. George Champion
1882-1901



Rev. Sangarapillai Samuel
Somasundaram
1912-1916

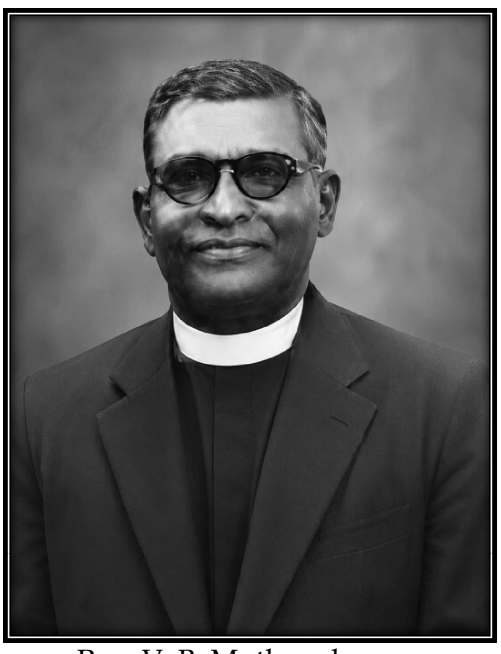


Rev. S. C. Daniel
1912-1926



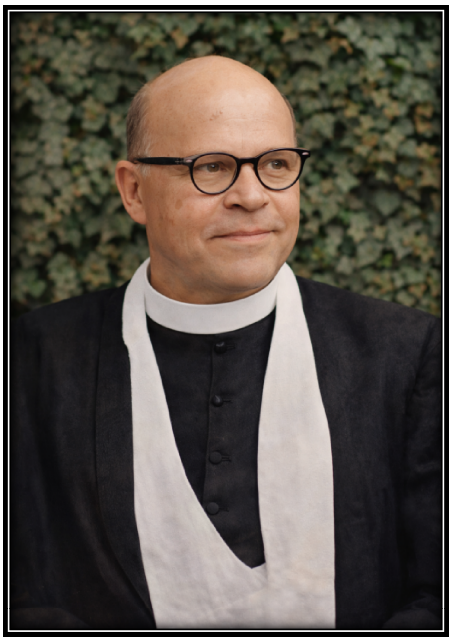
Rev. Isaac Tambyah
1922-1932/1936

Rev. I. S.Ratnathickam
1932-1936

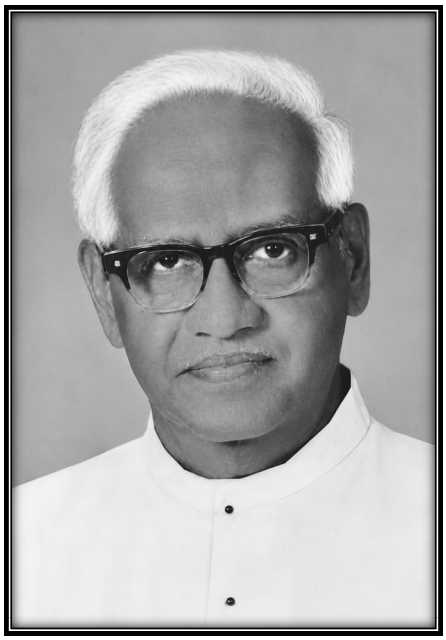


Rev. V. B. Muthuveloe
1936-1956

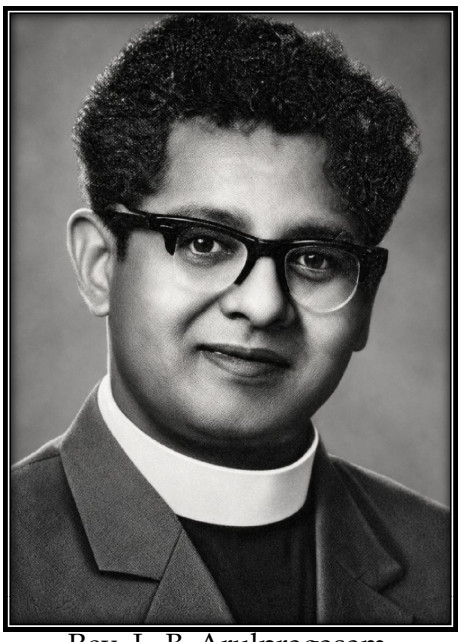
Rev. W. R. Coomarasamy
1956-1963/1964-1968



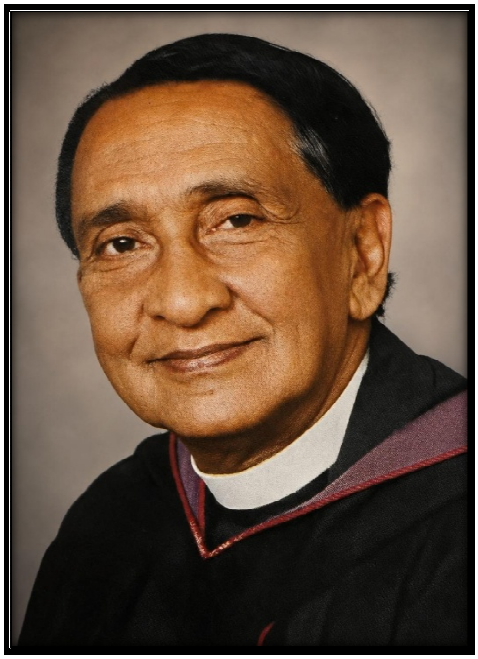
Rev. J. T. Arulanantham
1963-1964



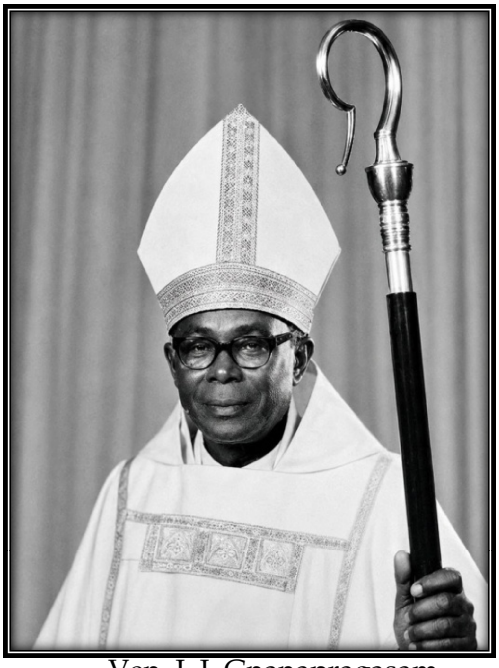
Canon V.S.D. Sathianadhan
1969-1970



Rev. L. B. Arulpragasam
1970



Rev. A. J. C. Selvaratnam
1971-1976



Ven. J. J. Gnanapragasam
1976-1978

Ven. J. Sarvananthan
1978-1989

Rev. Bennet Balasingh
1990

Ven. Selliah Philip Nesakumar
1991-2003/2007-2011

Rev. N. J. Gnanaponrajah
2004-2006

Rev. Ven. Samuel Jeyanthkumar Jeyaveerasingan
2012-2016

Ven. Samuel Jeyakumar Ponniah
2017-2021

Rev. Selvanayagam Stephen Jebachelvan
2022-

Honouring our Faithful Church Caretakers

Simon Rasaiah
1960s

Karththigasu
Kunaratnam
1972-1984

S. Rangaiah
1980s

Muthaiyah David
1989-2023

Rasakili Vimalaruban
2023 -

Editorial Note: *The information relating to the Church Caretakers, including their names and periods of service, has been gathered primarily from oral sources, as no official parish records are available. Consequently, there may be inaccuracies in the dates of service and the spelling of certain names.*

Precious Memories of Pothagar, the Parish and the Parsonage Life and Ministry of Rev. Raju Coomarasamy and Mrs. Pavalam Coomarasamy at St. John's Church (1956 – 1963 & 1964 – 1968)

When Appa (Raju Pothagar as he was fondly called) and Amma (Pothagar Amma) moved into 2 Kandy Road with our sister Thayala and our late brother Noel in 1956, they began what became a 13-year journey with St. John the Baptist's Church family. Appa also served as Chaplain of St. John's College, Jaffna. The following year brought deep sorrow when Noel died, yet God, our Refuge, had already placed comfort in our home through the arrival of baby Thanja just weeks earlier. By the time Appa completed his ministry at St. John's, all four of us were school-aged, with Amma teaching at Chundikuli Girls' College.

Time has rolled on, but as the four children of Raju and Pavalam, we still treasure the memories of our childhood, our father's ministry, and the life of the church. We invite all who remember them to join us in this walk down memory lane.

The Pothagar, the Church and Community Life

Appa was deeply rooted in Anglican tradition and taught us the history, mission, and rhythm of the church. Having served in Mutwal, Mattakuliya, Pallai, Nallur and other parts of Sri Lanka, he was fluent in all three languages and moved easily among people of every background. His pastoral heart embraced everyone, young and old, across caste, class, and creed. Many still speak of his gentle guidance and the way he connected with youth. He was so loved that on his death, the late Mr. Anandanayagam, our musician, composed a beautiful song about Appa.

Sundays were full: early morning services, Sunday School, Confirmation classes, youth fellowship, Evening School service. Appa's trained voice added richness and joy to the singing. The well-loved Vacation Bible School with the final-day march with the handheld microphone remains vivid in our minds. Lent and Holy Week were deeply meaningful,

from the Palm Sunday 'Hosanna' March to Maundy Thursday and the three-hour Good Friday service, not to mention the vegetarian diet of the week. Appa welcomed pulpit exchanges and invited gifted speakers and missionaries from various denominations, enriching the church's spiritual life.

One of the hallmarks of his ministry was the renovation and rededication of the old lead-roofed church, a moment made special by the presence of Rt. Rev. Graham Campbell, who had ordained him.

St. John's was a lively, engaged community. Families shared responsibilities, creating a strong sense of belonging. The Mothers' Union thrived. The Annual Ingathering Sale was always a grand thanksgiving for God's provision, made up of generous contributions by the ladies, including Mrs. Jeevu Champion's signature sweet, the coconut rock. Amma made a variety of sweets and recruited us children to help pack them while involving our gifted domestic helper Sirima to make children's dresses.

The community was full of life. People of different backgrounds and passions mingled with ease. It was shared life without borders. The adjoining CMS schools, St. John's and Chundikuli Girls' College, added to the vibrancy of community life. With our uncle, Mr. A.W. Rajasekeram, serving as Principal of St. John's College, the parsonage and principal's bungalow felt like one extended home.

The Unstoppable Pothagar on the bicycle

Appa loved the Lord and his flock wholeheartedly. His pastoral visits were constant, and nothing would stop him from responding to crises, be it day or midnight. He refused a car and preferred to identify with the less privileged. We still meet people who recall stories of how they were blessed by the prayer and personal care extended by Appa as their parish priest.

Even when doctors warned him to slow down, he continued faithfully, much to Amma's dismay. His physician and school friend, Dr. Vethanayagam, could do little to deter him. He was faithful to His calling to serve till the very end. The physician on earth had little influence when Appa wanted to follow the Greatest Physician, his Good Shepherd.

Precious Parsonage – A home without walls

Life at 2 Kandy Road was simple and full of character. The cadjan roof, bucket toilet and well were eventually replaced by taps and a water tank - much to our relief. The backyard, with its tamarind tree, provided shade for Thanja and Vana to practice Karnatic music. The many fruit trees proved a massive temptation to the hostel boys from St. John's to jump over the fence. The cemetery between the parsonage and church was our childhood nightmare; none of us dared walk past it alone even in daytime for the many horror stories that filled the air.

Appa's front office was off-limits to us but always open to anyone seeking the Pothagar's help. Temptations like the cassock pockets, wine bottles, bamboo covers, and communion wafers were kept at bay by strict family rules, much to little Mithran's frustration as he eyed the bamboo covers for cricket pads. The verandah was the venue for Sunday School play/singing practices and for the Carol parties, either to kick off or to wind up.

The guest room hosted many beloved visitors: The Rt. Rev. Graham Campbell, Bishop Harold de Soyza, and other friends. Ms. Hutchins, Ms. Baker, and local missionaries like Periannan, Sam annan and Chinannan joined us at meals whenever they dropped in. Visits from Ms. Matthai, Ms. Kelk, Rev. Barlow and Rev. Bavink were marked by grand dinners planned by Amma and prepared by Gabriel or Nalliah, the sextons. Our only complaint was washing and storing all the crockery afterward!

The love and compassion of Pothagar and Pothagar Amma knew no boundary, so much so that the parsonage was known and loved by neighbours regardless of which faith they belonged to. The trust placed in Appa and Amma was so deep that even we children could walk into Bastiampillai's shop and "buy" things on credit. Such was the affection, trust and confidence the community had in them. No doubt, we all have fond memories of 2 Kandy Road, which was clearly recognized as the 'Home for ALL people'.

The Pothagar and his beloved family serving together

Appa was a soothing voice whenever we were ill and homebound. In between his meetings in the front office,

he would walk in to check in on us and give us the drink or meal Amma would have prepared before she went to teach. While Appa was the appointed Vicar of the parish, Amma's support was limited only by time. While working as a full-time teacher at Chundikuli Girls' College and running the house, Amma made sure she was available for pastoral care and other church activities. She oversaw the Sunday School and joined in pastoral visits, at times on her own, too. Their heart for God was seen in the love they had for the parishioners. The Parsonage was a 'walk-in' centre for anyone who needed a listening ear. Saturday evenings, while Amma was preparing dinner, we four children would accompany Appa, walking through the brasso-smelling vestry to help him prepare the church for the next day. While Thayala would practice on the organ, the rest of us would place the books on the pews and help the sexton Rasiah to arrange the place, not to mention the little pranks we attempted in between, such as standing near the lectern pretending to lead a service or imitating some of the guest preachers.

The unexpected end but never-ending legacy

Appa longed to return to St. James' Church where he had served before but within two months of beginning his ministry there, the Lord called him Home. It was a shock to the young widow and four young children, yet we rejoice that Appa was faithful to the end, and we have no doubt that he would have heard the voice of Jesus say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." A few months after his passing, we moved back to live in Chundikuli and rejoined St. John's family until we left for higher studies or marriage.

We share these reflections with thankful hearts to God for Appa and Amma, whose lives influenced our own to follow Jesus, to recognize His calling in our lives and to serve Him in our various fields. All glory to our Lord Jesus Christ, whose return we eagerly await.

For the Lord is good and his love endures forever; his faithfulness continues through all generations. (Ps 100:5)

May His faithfulness in the life of St. John's Church continue and His Kingdom continue to be extended through the faithfulness of the St. John the Baptist Church family.

By: Thayala Richards, Thanja Peiris, Vana Eliezer & Mithran Coomarasamy (Children of the late Rev. William Rajaratnam (Raju) & Mrs. Pavalam Coomarasamy)

Mrs. Chandramalar Navaratnam (née Rajasingham)
1932–2020
- A Life of Music, Faith and Dedicated Service

As St. John the Baptist Church, Chundikuli, celebrates its 225th anniversary, we remember with gratitude the many faithful individuals whose selfless service has enriched the life of the parish. Among them is Mrs. Chandramalar Navaratnam (née Rajasingham), whose ministry of music spanned more than two decades and left an enduring legacy.

Born in 1932 into the well-known Rajasingham family of Chelsea Gardens, Kollupitiya, Colombo, Chandra received her education at CMS Ladies' College, Colombo. In 1951, following her marriage to S. Navaratnam (S.M., C.G.R.), the family moved to Chundikuli, Jaffna, on his transfer, together with their five young children.

Tragedy struck when Mr. Navaratnam passed away unexpectedly at the young age of 36, while still in service. Despite this profound loss, Chandra was encouraged by the close-knit Anglican community in Chundikuli to remain in Jaffna, enabling her children to continue their education at the two CMS institutions—St. John's College and Chundikuli Girls' College.

A qualified music teacher—one of only a handful in Jaffna at the time—Chandra was invited by the Rev. Raju Coomarasamy, then Vicar of St. John the Baptist Church, to serve as the church's organist in 1964. She faithfully carried out this voluntary ministry for twenty years, serving under the leadership of the Rev. Coomarasamy, the Rev. Sathianadhan, the Rev. Arulpragasam, the Rev. A. J. C. Selvaratnam, Bishop J. J. Gnanapragasam, and the Rev. J. Sarvananthan.

Her musical gifts became an integral part of the worship life of the parish. Through hymns, anthems, and sacred music, she enhanced countless services, weddings, funerals, and special celebrations. Many parishioners still fondly remember the stirring strains of the Wedding March that accompanied joyous occasions, as well as the solemn music that brought comfort during funeral services. Her music became woven into the memories of generations of worshippers.

Beyond her service to the church, Chandra made an outstanding contribution to music education in Jaffna. Affectionately known as "Navaratnam Miss," she joined the tutorial staff of St. John's College in 1967 as the Western Music Teacher and Choir Director, serving with distinction until her retirement in 1987. She inspired and trained numerous students, many of whom successfully completed the Trinity College of Music London examinations. For several years, her home at 171B, Groussault Road, Chundikuli, served as the Trinity College London examination centre for Jaffna, reflecting the high regard with which she was held within the musical community.

Following the family's return to Colombo in 1989, Chandra continued her ministry as organist at the Church of St. Michael and All Angels, Kollupitiya, where she served faithfully for more than a decade.

For the Navaratnam family, St. John the Baptist Church was far more than a place of worship—it was a second home. Chandra's unwavering faith, exceptional musical talent, and humble spirit touched countless lives and enriched the worship of the parish for many years.

As we commemorate 225 years of God's faithfulness to St. John the Baptist Church, we gratefully honour the life and ministry of Chandramalar Navaratnam. Her legacy continues to resonate in the hearts of those who were blessed by her music, her teaching, and her steadfast Christian witness.

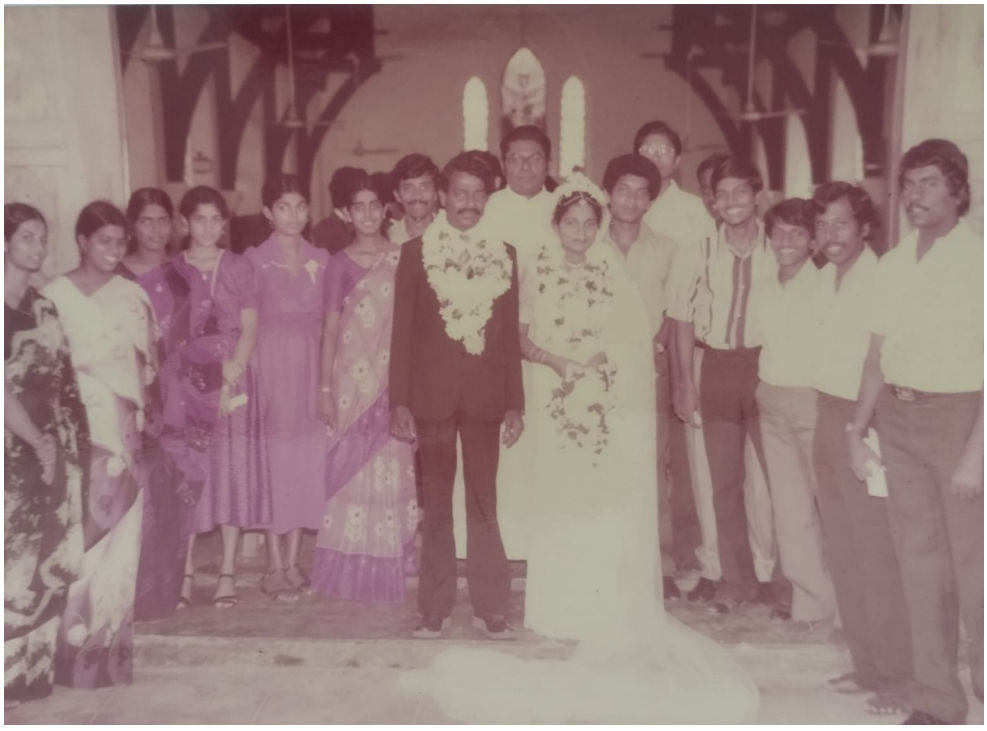
Written with love and gratitude by the Navaratnam family, in memory of our mother, Chandramalar Navaratnam.

Treasured Memories in Photographs

The Church Choir during the Ministry of Canon V.S.D. Sathianadhan

Parishioners with Canon V.S.D. Sathianadhan on the Occasion of His Farewell

Mothers Union in the 1970s



The Choir in 1984 at a Wedding

Participants at a Youth Fellowship Camp in the 1980s

Participants at a Youth Fellowship Camp in the 1980s